

The Male Coming-of-Age Theme in the Hebrew Bible

by

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

This study identifies and elaborates on a theme in the Hebrew Bible (HB) that has largely gone unnoticed by scholars: the transition of a male adolescent from boyhood to manhood. Beyond identifying the coming-of-age theme in different HB texts, the project also describes how the theme is employed by biblical narrators and redactors to highlight broader messages and transitions in the historical narratives of the HB. It also considers how these stories provide insight into the varying representations of biblical masculinity.

The project begins by showing how the recent discussions on masculinity in the HB and biblical rites of passage are incomplete without an analysis of how a boy becomes a man in the biblical text. It then establishes important principles for recognizing the maturation theme in a given narrative. More foundational work is done in chapter 2, which describes the characteristic features of manhood and boyhood as depicted in the HB to facilitate the identification of narratives where a transition is made from boyhood to manhood.

The next two chapters identify five case studies of coming-of-age: David in 1 Sam 17; Solomon in 1 Kgs 1-2; an alternative tale of Solomon's maturation in 1 Kgs 3; Moses in Exod 2; and Samuel in 1 Sam 3. Chapter 5 discusses the converse of the coming-of-age theme by presenting stories of boys who fail to mature: Jether in Judg 8, and Samson in Judg 13-16. In each case study, the narrator's techniques for highlighting the maturation theme are identified. The ways that the narrator employs the theme to point to other

significant plot points or narrative transitions are also identified. Most notably, the failure-to-mature theme in the Samson narratives typifies Israel's political immaturity in Judges, and the two alternative tales of Solomon's maturation highlight an important transition in the Deuteronomistic History from the uncertain and often bloody years of the monarchy's establishment to the peaceful, prosperous reign of Solomon.

The seven case studies are also examined for the image of masculinity that they present, and that presentation is compared to the general view of manhood in the HB. Five of the seven offer quite similar images of masculinity; and these also cohere to the general picture of biblical manhood. However, two narratives (Samuel's maturation in 1 Sam 3 and Solomon's in 1 Kgs 3) depart from this conception of masculinity, each in the same way: both depict a masculinity free of violence and the need for the constant, forceful defense of manhood and honor. Since these two texts have often been ascribed to the same author, the Deuteronomistic Historian, the study suggests that he may be offering a new view of masculinity more suited to his historical context.

The project ultimately proves that the theme of male coming-of-age, heretofore virtually unrecognized, is found in several biblical texts. Moreover, this theme is often used to indicate other important messages and transitions in Israel's historical narrative and can provide unique insight into biblical constructions of masculinity.

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Acknowledgements

It has often occurred to me in the course of writing this dissertation on coming-of-age that this process has to a great extent marked my own maturation as a scholar (and yes, perhaps in some ways as a man). And as with most initiation rites, a host of venerable elders has guided me through the often harrowing process. At the outset of this study, I would like to acknowledge their contributions to its completion.

I would first like to express my sincere thanks to my dissertation adviser, Carol Meyers. Carol's clarity of thought, attention to detail, and ability to provide practical solutions to convoluted theoretical problems helped me to streamline and discipline my thoughts during the writing process; and without this assistance the project could have followed a number of unproductive and time-consuming tangents. I am most thankful to Carol, however, for her high standards for me and my writing, her patience with me when I fell short of these expectations, and her belief in me that I could live up to them even when I worried that I could not. She demanded and eventually brought forth my best work.

This study represents the culmination of an education that began as a child. My parents, Robert and Barbara Wilson, instilled in me a commitment to hard work that they modeled daily on our family farm, as well as a fascination with learning, and a profound respect for the Scriptures. I am immeasurably indebted to them and to the rest of my family. I am also grateful for the humility that comes with the awareness that,

despite my degrees in biblical studies, I still am not the most knowledgeable student of the Bible in my family.

The initial interest in the Bible I inherited from my family would not have become my life's work were it not for the inspiration of Tod Linafelt: master of reality, martial artist, and professor of theology at Georgetown University. Tod introduced me to an entirely new way of reading the Bible, encouraged me to trust my exegetical instincts, and convinced me to become a biblical scholar. His influence is evident in all of my work, including this dissertation. Mark George also had an important impact on this study since it began as a half-baked eight-page paper written in an all-night Denver diner for his Judges seminar at Iliff School of Theology. Mark saw the potential in these nascent ideas—and in me—and has remained a trusted mentor.

My thanks also go out to the other members of my dissertation committee: Ellen Davis, Eric Meyers, Stephen Chapman, and Susan Niditch. Ellen's unwavering encouragement and generosity with her time have buoyed my spirits again and again over the past few years, and she has done more than anyone else to motivate my study of Hebrew language—and to show me why this is so vital to my future as a biblical scholar. Eric initially encouraged me to apply to Duke and has remained a helpful and informative presence during my time here. Stephen kindly offered to teach a seminar on the Deuteronomistic History with my interests in mind, and the final paper for that course laid the foundations for this dissertation. Susan Niditch's work on Samson inspired my initial reflections on this heroic figure, and with her expertise in folklore

studies, she brought important sources on coming-of-age in traditional literature to my attention.

I would also like to thank Dr. Kevin Moore for his patient, careful, and erudite editing of several of the following chapters. Knowing that my work would pass before him prior to reaching a broader audience freed me to let my ideas take shape without stopping after every sentence to ensure that each “i” was dotted and every “t” crossed. I owe him much more than just coffee.

These “elders” that have guided me through this academic rite of passage certainly deserve their credit; but this project would have been a much more difficult experience were it not for the support and counsel of a cohort of fellow “initiates,” some going through the same experience of doctoral study, others on different paths with their own unique challenges and milestones. My thanks to Ben Gordon (who also provided helpful formatting and editing assistance), Juli and Corey Kalbaugh, Hans Arneson, Jess Wong, Kate Bowler, Tobin Penner, Josh Vis, Erin Darby, P. J. “Russell” Wright, Nas Gallina, Jeff Scholes, Gregory Boylan (O. J. B.), Grant S. C. Gieseke, Robert Moses, Tina L. Wilson, and Dr. Robert Wilson, Jr.

Finally, to my best friend and strongest supporter, the longsuffering Blair Wilson: my most heartfelt thanks and love for sharing all the joys, frustrations, failures, and successes of the last six years in Durham. I could never have completed this project, or the doctoral program, without you.

Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Survey

One of the most significant social and physiological transitions in life is the change from childhood to adulthood. However, identifying and describing this transition in a particular culture is often difficult because the age or developmental stage at which a person is considered an adult, as well as the way that change is socially recognized, differs considerably among cultures. This difficulty is exacerbated with boys, since they lack the definitive physiological indication of their development that girls possess in menarche.

As a result of the imprecise border between childhood and adulthood for boys, many cultures stage elaborate and occasionally traumatic public rituals for groups of boys to announce their transition into manhood — thereby providing proof of maturation despite the lack of observable physiological evidence.¹ These rituals are often accompanied by myths that are concerned with the theme of male coming-of-age and that feature boy protagonists whose maturation in the story reflects that of the young male initiates. Such coming-of-age stories, however, are not only found in connection with maturation rituals. Indeed, in the modern West, where formal coming-of-age rites

¹ In contrast to these public rituals for groups of boys, the rites that accompany a girls' maturation in many societies are private and individual. See Bruce Lincoln, *Emerging from the Chrysalis: Rituals of Women's Initiation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 91-109.

for boys have all but vanished—the noteworthy exception being the Jewish ritual of bar mitzvah—the enduring popularity of stories that incorporate this theme is unmistakable, which is evident by such “initiator boy heroes” as young Werther, David Copperfield, and Luke Skywalker, some of the most memorable characters in modern literature and film.

In light of the prevalence of the narrative theme of male coming-of-age—even in societies lacking a system of maturation rites—it is worth asking whether this theme is attested in the literature of ancient Israel found in the Hebrew Bible (HB). Considering that many of the most recognizable male heroes in the HB are initially introduced into the narrative as boys, the potential for locating male coming-of-age narratives is high. It is curious, therefore, that with a few exceptions noted below, scholars of the HB have not previously undertaken a study of biblical depictions of maturation from boyhood into manhood.

This lacuna in biblical scholarship is especially noteworthy because of the comparatively large amount of attention scholars have paid to two closely related topics. The first is the growing field of HB masculinity studies, which attempts to illuminate the tacit assumptions about manhood found in the biblical text. Yet despite this increased interest in biblical manhood, *how* a character becomes a man after previously being

considered only a potential man (i.e., a boy) has not been addressed. In addition, as I will argue below, any discussion of manhood is incomplete unless accompanied by a consideration of boyhood and how a boy transitions into manhood.

The second topic concerns rites of passage. Even though this concept has informed biblical narrative exegesis for decades, a review of the history of research into rites of passage indicates that this concept was originally applied by anthropologists as a way to understand coming-of-age rituals. Regrettably, by applying the concept of rites of passage to biblical texts without also discussing coming-of-age, biblical scholarship has heretofore missed the opportunity to apply this concept to a uniquely appropriate subject.

The present study therefore is an attempt to fill these lacunae in biblical scholarship. The primary objective is to read a select group of biblical narratives in light of the coming-of-age theme. The introduction opens with a more detailed look at the two subjects closely related to coming-of-age just discussed: masculinity in the HB, and the exegetical application of the rites-of-passage schema to biblical narratives. The review of these two subjects includes a discussion of their roots in fields external to the discipline of biblical studies: masculinity studies and anthropology. This examination

clarifies the application of these concepts (and occasionally their misapplication) in biblical studies and introduces how each respective subject informs the present project.

The first two sections below, therefore, examine how masculinity studies and rite-of-passage analysis have influenced biblical studies as well as how they provide important foundational work for an investigation of the coming-of-age theme. The third and final section of this introductory chapter begins with a discussion of previous attempts by HB scholars to identify the coming-of-age theme in various biblical narratives. After highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of these attempts, four methodological principles, which guide the identification of this theme in the present project and distinguish this study from previous scholarship, are presented. The introduction concludes by detailing the scope and goals of the project, including an outline of the argument in the subsequent chapters.

1.1 The Impact of Masculinity Studies on Biblical Scholarship and this Project

The interdisciplinary field of masculinity studies gained momentum in the last quarter of the twentieth century as an inheritor of first- and second-wave feminism's critique of gender essentialism and patriarchal rule. It continues feminism's examination

of gender's importance in shaping social life by discussing the impact of a society's construction of masculinity on the experiences of its men. Scholars in this field therefore attempt to reveal the often implicit assumptions about masculinity that perpetuate adult male domination and oppression of women and children.

In the following section, I briefly outline the history of this field of inquiry and identify the two major contributions of masculinity studies to research on manhood in the HB. Additionally, I demonstrate how these two concepts frame my research.

1.1.1 History of the Field

When reviewing the history of masculinity studies, most specialists in the field begin with Freud and the advent of psychoanalysis in the early twentieth century.² Freud believed that a mixture of femininity and masculinity is found in every person. During childhood, as gender development takes place, one of the two gender identities (i.e., femininity or masculinity) is encouraged while the other is suppressed but never entirely absent.³ This revolutionary thought challenged the reigning notions of pure

² See e.g., R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Cambridge and Oxford: Polity Press, 1995), 7-9; Stephen M. Whitehead, *Men and Masculinities: Key Themes and New Directions* (Cambridge and Oxford: Polity Press, 2002), 23-26; and Rachel Adams and David Savran, *The Masculinity Studies Reader* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2002), 9-13.

³ This notion of the presence of both masculinity and femininity within every individual was also discussed by Jung, who argued that for men a balance exists between the masculine "persona" (the public self shaped by social interactions) and the female "anima" (the unconscious self). See Connell, *Masculinities*, 12-14.

masculinity or pure femininity as well as the belief that there was something biologically natural and essential about the differences between men and women. Freud thereby cleared the way for the discussion of the cultural construction of gender in feminist theory and masculinity studies in the next century.⁴

The next significant precursor to modern masculinity studies is sex-role theory, which dominated sociological reflection on gender in the mid-twentieth century. The major tenet of this theory is that both the masculine and feminine genders are internalized through socialization and are performed as roles on the social stage. Performing these roles through enacting prescribed behaviors and attitudes results in a smoothly functioning society and psychologically well-adjusted individuals within that society—just as an actor’s proper role-playing ensures the smooth functioning of a theatrical performance.⁵ Modern masculinity studies maintains the notion of gender as cultural performance, which is central to sex-role theory. However, the greatest impact of sex-role theory on masculinity studies in its current iteration is that it provides a

⁴ The recognition of Freud as an important predecessor of masculinity studies is likely because of the indebtedness of scholars of masculinity to second-wave feminism, which took a much more positive view of Freudian thought than did first-wave feminism. See Whitehead, *Men and Masculinities*, 23-33.

⁵ Sex-role theory is most often viewed as an outgrowth of the work of Talcott Parsons, particularly his notions of functionalism and the socialization of individuals to serve society’s needs. See the discussion of sex-role theory in Whitehead, *Men and Masculinities*, 19-23.

theory against which to react. Indeed, the criticism of sex-role theory seems to be one of the few uniting concepts in the diverse field of masculinity studies.

Scholars of masculinity find several reasons to critique sex-role theory. First, by stressing how male and female roles complement each other for the sake of society, sex-role theorists neglect the importance of power in defining these roles and in perpetuating inequalities between men and women, as well as among men.⁶

Furthermore, sex-role theory fails to account for the fact that few men within a given society actually live up to the society's ideal masculine role. Since masculinity is better viewed as a broad range or spectrum rather than a singular definitive type, many varieties exist within a society at a given time, some of which radically depart from the oversimplified and unitary "masculine role" that sex-role theorists posit.⁷ Similarly, since sex-role theory is premised on a male/female binary, it does not account for the wide spectrum of biological sexuality, which includes hermaphrodites, eunuchs, and the

⁶ See Tim Carrigan, Bob Connell, and John Lee, "Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity," in Adams and Savran, *Masculinity Studies Reader*, 107; repr. from *Theory and Society* 14 (1985). See also Connell, *Masculinities*, 21-30.

⁷ See Carrigan, Connell, and Lee, "Toward a New Sociology," 107. See also Whitehead, *Men and Masculinities*, 22.

transgendered.⁸ Finally, sex-role theory does not sufficiently recognize the historical variability of masculinity—that is, that the characteristics and actions expected of a man can radically change over time within a society.⁹

In response to these weaknesses in classic sex-role theory, modern masculinity studies seeks to create a theory of masculinity that acknowledges: (1) the role of power in establishing and perpetuating the cultural performance of masculinity; (2) the multiple articulations of masculinity within a society at any time; and (3) diachronic changes in masculinity. The notion of “hegemonic masculinity,” formulated initially by Carrigan, offers scholars a corrective to these deficiencies of sex-role theory.

According to Carrigan, societies invariably create a “culturally exalted form of masculinity” that he dubs “hegemonic masculinity,” which comes to dominate that society’s view of what it means to be a man to the detriment of other possible articulations of masculinity.¹⁰ It is worth noting that any hegemonic masculinity is a product of a particular historical moment and therefore can change over time.¹¹ Despite

⁸ For a discussion of the spectrum of biological sexual features that fall between the poles of male and female, see Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 1-45.

⁹ See Arthur Brittan, *Masculinity and Power* (Oxford and New York: Blackwell, 1989), 19-24. See also Michael S. Kimmel, *The Gendered Society* (3d ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 92-97.

¹⁰ Carrigan, Connell, and Lee, “Toward a New Sociology,” 112.

¹¹ See Connell, *Masculinities*, 185-203.

the fact that only a few men embody this hegemonic ideal, most men are complicit in sustaining it for reasons that include “gratification through fantasy, compensation through displaced aggression” or the benefit of the perpetuation of male dominance over women—a feature of nearly every example of hegemonic masculinity in history.¹²

Hegemonic masculinity naturally generates these “complicit” forms of masculinity. However, it also brings about a social order where subordinate and marginalized masculinities exist in relationship to the hegemonic ideal.¹³ The former include types of masculinity that are actively oppressed and “expelled from the circle of legitimacy.”¹⁴ The latter consist of masculinities that are not viewed as normative because they are associated with a marginalized race, ethnic affiliation, or economic class.¹⁵

¹² Carrigan, Connell, and Lee, “Toward a New Sociology,” 113. Note that while there are similarities between hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy, the two are not to be equated. According to Whitehead (*Men and Masculinities*, 90): “hegemonic masculinity differs from patriarchy in that there is less of an essentialist assumption about the outcome or conditions under which this gender power play is experienced and enacted. For while the fundamental premise remains that male power is a ‘hegemonic project’... embedded in ideological and material structures, there is space for ambiguity—and change.”

¹³ So Connell, *Masculinities*, 76-86.

¹⁴ Ibid., 79. According to Connell, homosexual masculinities are the most obvious example of subordinated masculinity in modern Western society, however any other masculinity that is seen as too feminine is included, such as the “wimp, milksop, nerd...mother’s boy...geek...and so on” (ibid.).

¹⁵ Ibid., 80-81. Presumably, this list of the causes for marginalization of a particular articulation of masculinity could include any affiliation or identity that differs from the authoritative hegemonic ideal, such as one’s religious affiliation. However, Connell does not specifically mention religion as a factor in marginalization.

In sum, the history of masculinity studies begins with Freud in the early twentieth century. Its contemporary iteration draws a major assumption from sex-role theory (i.e., the view of gender as a cultural performance), but it is more defined by its reaction against that mid-twentieth century school of thought. The most recent significant development in the field—the notion of hegemonic masculinity—is the culmination of previous work that inherits assumptions from Freud and sex-role theory while also providing important correctives to them.

1.1.2 Two Contributions of Masculinity Studies to Biblical Scholarship and the Current Project

The preceding review of the history of masculinity studies provides the context for examining the impact of this field on the study of masculinity in the HB, including this project.¹⁶ Two principles from masculinity studies in particular will be emphasized because of the crucial role they play in this investigation of coming-of-age narratives in the HB. These concepts are: (1) hegemonic masculinity; and (2) masculinity as a cultural performance, especially one characterized by the need to avoid feminization.

¹⁶ For a summary of the impact of masculinity studies on New Testament scholarship, see Stephen D. Moore and Janice Capel Anderson, eds., *New Testament Masculinities* (SemeiaSt 45; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 4-16. For more a more recent discussion of the question, see Brittany E. Wilson, *Unmanly Men: Refigurations of Masculinity in Luke-Acts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

1.1.2.1 Hegemonic masculinity

The first major contribution to the study of manhood in the HB is the concept of hegemonic masculinity—a central notion in contemporary masculinity studies. The initial application of masculinity studies by biblical scholars frequently involved an attempt to identify the features of Israelite hegemonic masculinity in biblical texts. The most influential example of this approach is Clines' "David the Man: The Construction of Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible." In this article Clines demonstrates that a succinct summary of biblical hegemonic masculinity (one characterized by strength, wisdom, beauty, and the avoidance of women) is present in the description of David in 1 Sam 16:18.¹⁷ In contrast, in recent years scholars have taken more interest in investigating how hegemonic masculinity in the biblical world interacted with alternative suppressed masculinities. This interpretative approach claims that certain biblical texts attempt to subvert the hegemonic form of masculinity prevalent in the ancient Near East. For instance, Haddox argues that the masculinity embodied in the ancestral narratives in

¹⁷ David J. A. Clines, "David the Man: The Construction of Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible," in *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible*. (ed. David Clines; JSOTSup 205; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 216-27. This article will receive a more detailed treatment in the discussion of Israelite manhood in chapter 2, 58-80.

Genesis is actually a *subordinate* masculinity that is much more submissive than the hegemonic masculinity dominant in the ancient Near East.¹⁸

The concept of hegemonic masculinity informs this research project most significantly by acting as a check to incautious speculation on the *overall* conception of masculinity in ancient Israel. Given that the final form of the text of the Hebrew Bible is largely a product of elite urban adult males, it most likely reflects an elite style of masculinity shared by those powerful ruling men—that is, a hegemonic masculinity.¹⁹ As a result, the HB does not provide a reliable guide to the complicit, subordinate, or marginalized masculinities embodied by the majority of ancient Israelite men, despite the recent claims of biblical scholars to recognize these alternatives to hegemonic masculinity. This study therefore assumes that the conclusions about biblical masculinity reached through the reading of coming-of-age stories are limited to hegemonic masculinity. Even when a coming-of-age narrative presents an alternative to

¹⁸ Susan E. Haddox, "Favoured Sons and Subordinate Masculinities," in *Men and Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond* (ed. Ovidiu Creangă; The Bible in the Modern World 33; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2010), 15-16. See also Brian Charles DiPalma, "De/Constructing Masculinity in Exodus 1-4," in Creangă, *Men and Masculinity*, 36-51. DiPalma argues that in the narratives of Moses' youth in Exod 2, the hegemonic masculinity represented by Pharaoh is undercut, and Moses' character deconstructs the values of this hegemonic masculinity by embodying opposite values.

¹⁹ Carol Meyers discusses the elite perspective of the urban men who composed and canonized the HB, as opposed to the perspective of the 90% rural ancient Israelite society, in "Contesting the Notion of Patriarchy: Anthropology and the Theorizing of Gender in Ancient Israel," in *A Question of Sex? Gender and Difference in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond* (ed. Deborah W. Rooke; Hebrew Bible Monographs 14; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2007), 85.

the conventional ideal of masculinity (e.g., the stories of Solomon in 1 Kgs 3 and of Samuel in 1 Sam 1-3, as demonstrated below), the alternative is not necessarily an example of a subordinate or marginalized Israelite masculinity. Instead, since even the coming-of-age stories that present alternative masculinities are mediated through elite authors—otherwise they likely would not have been preserved in the canon—such stories only offer an *alternative hegemonic masculinity* (i.e., a new elite articulation of masculinity for new circumstances), as opposed to a complicit, subordinate, or marginalized masculinity that would have been found among non-elite males.

1.1.2.2 Masculinity as a cultural performance marked by the avoidance of feminization

The second major contribution of masculinity studies to research on masculinity in the HB is based on a fundamental premise of sex-role theory, namely, that masculinity is not a natural given but is comparable to a role performed before an audience. Masculinity, in the words of Judith Butler, is “cultural performance,” an “identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts.”²⁰ Moreover, since manhood is a cultural performance rather than a natural state, it is precarious and must be

²⁰ Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” in *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theater* (ed. Sue-Ellen Case; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 270.

repeatedly affirmed and defended by frequent displays of manliness. The essential component of any such “display of manliness,” and indeed the unifying feature of the masculine social script, is the avoidance of feminization. In short, to be a man is not to be a woman.²¹

The concept of masculinity as performance—particularly a performance characterized by opposition to what is perceived as feminine—has become a central tenet of the study of biblical masculinity. For example, from the time that Clines published his seminal article on biblical masculinity (“David the Man”), scholars have not questioned his conclusion that being a man in the HB required separation from and disassociation with all things feminine.²² Regrettably, biblical scholars failed to ask the question of *why* masculinity in general, and specifically biblical masculinity, is constructed primarily as a negation and avoidance of femininity. This formulation was simply assumed to be the case without further reflection. However, the question of why masculinity is so often constructed as a negation of femininity has been the subject of speculation among anthropologists and psychologists associated with masculinity

²¹ Connell (*Masculinities*, 68) summarizes this thought succinctly: “masculinity does not exist except in contrast to femininity.” Brittan (*Masculinity and Power*, 3) similarly writes that “masculinity...does not exist in isolation from femininity—it will always be an expression of the current image that men have of themselves in relation to women.” See also Whitehead, *Men and Masculinities*, 34.

²² See chapter 2, 73-80. I argue there that the characterization of biblical masculinity as opposed to all associations with femininity has in fact been too simplistically stated.

studies. It is significant that scholars who address the idea that hegemonic masculinity entails the avoidance of femininity most frequently connect this avoidance ultimately to the maturation and individuation processes in boys.

Sociologist and psychoanalyst Nancy Chodorow's illuminating work on masculine development is representative of scholarly reflection on the presupposition that masculinity is constructed in opposition to femininity.²³ She argues that every newborn, both male and female, first establishes a primary psychological identity and strong social bond with his or her mother. Later, after further growth, a time eventually comes when the child begins to think of itself as a psychological entity separate and independent from the mother.²⁴ For boys, this process entails an added difficulty in that individuation from the mother entails an awareness of gender difference.²⁵ To achieve an identity independent from his mother, a boy must therefore reject her gender

²³ See the related work of Jessica Benjamin (*The Bonds of Love* [New York: Pantheon, 1984]), Dorothy Dinnerstein (*The Mermaid and the Minotaur* [New York: Harper and Row, 1977]), and Lilian Rubin (*Intimate Strangers* [New York: Harper and Row, 1983]).

²⁴ This process is referred to by Margaret Mahler "separation-individuation." See Margaret Mahler, Fred Pine, and Anni Bergman, *The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant: Symbiosis and Individuation* (New York: Basic Books, 1975), 3.

²⁵ This understanding of male gender identity as a secondary event, following a primary female identification, contradicts Freud's claim that infant males possess male gender identity from birth, which results in the oedipal attraction to the mother and fear of the father. Because of their conviction that the important work of gender identity happens in infancy, but their simultaneous rejection of Freud's analysis of this identity formation, Chodorow and others like her are referred to as "Neo-Freudians." See David D. Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 26-29.

identity. This begins the pattern of rejecting the feminine as a way of demonstrating masculine maturation. As Chodorow states:

A boy, in his attempt to gain an elusive masculine identification, often comes to define his masculinity in largely negative terms, as that which is not feminine or involved with women. There is an internal and external aspect to this. Internally, the boy tries to reject his mother and deny his attachment to her and the strong dependency on her that he still feels. He also tries to deny the deep personal identification with her than has developed during his early years. He does this by repressing whatever he takes to be feminine inside himself, and, importantly, by denigrating whatever he considers to be feminine in the outside world.²⁶

Therefore, although the display of masculinity in adult men manifests itself as an avoidance of feminization, *it ultimately stems from an avoidance of infantilization* — a “revolt against boyishness [and] regression,” according to Chodorow and others.²⁷

The significance of Chodorow’s research is that it calls into question the common tendency of biblical scholars to define biblical manhood as a contrast to femininity. If the

²⁶ Nancy Chodorow, “Family Structure and Feminine Personality” in *Woman, Culture, and Society* (ed. Michelle Z. Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), 50. See also Robert Stoller, “Facts and Fancies: An Examination of Freud’s Concept of Bisexuality,” in *Women and Analysis: Dialogues on Psychoanalytic Views of Femininity* (ed. Jean Strouse; New York: Dell, 1974), 358.

²⁷ Roy Schafer, “Men Who Struggle Against Sentimentality,” in *The Psychology of Men: New Psychoanalytic Perspectives* (ed. Gerald I. Fogel, Frederick M. Lane, and Roy S. Liebert; New York: Basic Books, 1986), 100. For anthropological research that both relies upon and deepens this theory, see David Gilmore’s *Manhood in the Making*. Gilmore (ibid., 29) argues that from the perspective of a society, the regression of men to boyhood is a great danger, because society needs participating contributing adults to function properly. As a result, cultures construct their manhood imagery in stark opposition to boyhood. Moreover, the rituals that are employed to transition boys to manhood are designed to destroy remnants of childishness in the boys.

transition to manhood is essentially a revolt against boyishness—and not, ultimately, against femininity—then more attention should be given to how manhood is constructed vis-à-vis boyhood, since it is in emphasizing this difference that manhood is displayed. For that reason, the investigation of biblical narratives that describe how a boy becomes a man, with a special emphasis on how this difference is displayed, will serve to broaden scholarly research into masculinity in the HB.

1.1.2.3 Summary

The field of masculinity studies has contributed two ideas that have informed and shaped research on the representations of masculinity in the HB. First, the idea of hegemonic masculinity spawned several attempts to specify the details of biblical hegemonic masculinity as well as the search for marginalized and subordinate masculinities in the HB. Second, the notion of masculinity as a social script characterized by the need to avoid feminization has resulted in the convention of defining biblical masculinity in contrast to biblical femininity.

These aspects of masculinity studies are critical to this investigation because of their importance for research on a topic discussed in greater detail in the next chapter: biblical masculinity. They are important for two additional reasons. First, the concept of hegemonic masculinity provides an important delimitation to this study. Since the

masculinity found in the biblical text is the product of elite values (i.e., it is a *hegemonic* masculinity), it does not necessarily reflect the experience of the majority of ancient Israelite men. Therefore, my conclusions on masculinity garnered from reading male coming-of-age narratives are limited to the discussion of hegemonic masculinity.

Second, given that biblical scholars have incompletely applied these concepts, there is a current need for the present project. Specifically, the compelling argument that the fear of feminization is ultimately a fear of infantilization demonstrates that a discussion of masculinity in a culture is incomplete without a description of how the transition from childhood to manhood is made.

1.2 Rites of Passage: History, Application in Biblical Studies, and Relevance to this Project

Like masculinity studies, the concept of rites of passage originated in a field external to biblical studies—namely, anthropology—but has been applied by biblical scholars and is a valuable exegetical tool for the present project. After a brief overview of the history of research on rites of passage, I trace how this topic entered biblical studies through the work of Victor Turner. Next, I review and critique how the rites-of-passage concept has been employed by biblical scholars, paying particular attention to the

absence of a discussion of coming-of-age in this biblical scholarship. I then outline the principles guiding this project's use of the concept. I conclude by highlighting one additional insight from rites-of-passage research informing this project—namely, that the content of a society's male coming-of-age rites communicates much information about manhood in that society.

1.2.1 Formulation of the Theory of Rites of Passage and its Application to Literature

Anthropologist Arnold van Gennep first described rites of passage in the early twentieth century.²⁸ According to van Gennep, rites of passage are rituals performed at major social transition points in a person's life and are designed to facilitate these transitions, both for the individual and for the society recognizing the individual's change of status. His research identified a number of transition points with which rites of passage are associated, including pregnancy, childbirth, betrothal, marriage, and death. However, no social transition drew more of van Gennep's attention than the change from childhood to adulthood.²⁹ Van Gennep's discussion of rites involving the

²⁸ Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

²⁹ Van Gennep emphasizes the distinction between *social* and *physiological* puberty. For example, rites of passage that initiate a boy into manhood only mark social puberty, and thus can take place well before of after actual physiological puberty. The rites simply emphasize that in his society's eyes the boy has become

transition of a child into adulthood takes up almost a third of his original work on rites of passage.³⁰ Arguably, this extra attention to puberty rites is due to the fact that these rites mark a more elusive moment than those associated with other social transition points. Although the event that engenders the accompanying rite of passage is clear in the case of birth, marriage, and death, it is more difficult to identify in the case of initiation into adulthood. As mentioned above, this is especially the case for boys, whose physiological development at puberty is gradual and lacks a definitive sign to herald its onset.³¹ The rite itself, therefore, functions as the primary evidence for the transition to manhood, which lends it a special significance that warranted van Gennepe's extra attention.

Van Gennepe's contribution to the study of rites of passage goes beyond his recognition that across cultures humans use rituals to mark and facilitate social transitions. It is noteworthy that he discerned a remarkable consistency in the structure of the rites of passage that he studied, which included examples of rites from cultures on

a man, regardless of whether he has, for instance, grown facial hair or developed a more defined musculature (*ibid.*, 65-66).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 65-115.

³¹ Van Gennepe's interest in male puberty rites in particular can be seen in the high percentage of male-only puberty rites he discusses. Of the twenty-five examples of initiation rites, nineteen are male-only; four are for both males and females; and only two are female-only.

five continents. Each rite of passage, according to van Gennep, consisted of three phases: an initial period of separation, an intermediate marginal or “liminal” stage, and a concluding reintegration into society.³² For example, in the case of a typical rite of initiation from boyhood into manhood, a boy or more commonly a group of boys is removed both spatially and socially from their community in the separation phase. The marginal/liminal phase follows, during which the initiates—who are not yet considered men, but who are also no longer viewed as boys—are kept separate from society and are often subject to ordeals or are imparted with special knowledge. After this liminal phase concludes, the boys—or, rather, newly formed men—return to their society and are celebrated for transitioning successfully to manhood.³³

The apparent ubiquity of rites of passage and the elegance of van Gennep’s tripartite schema for describing their structure led to a century of anthropologists adopting his model.³⁴ However, van Gennep’s research would likely have not impacted

³² Ibid., 11. Van Gennep originally conceived of this structure as describing three different kinds of rituals that together form the rites of passage. Since van Gennep’s time, it is more common to classify these three kinds of rites as elements of a single ritual, consisting of a separation phase, a marginal phase, and a reintegration phase. See Alan Barnard and Jonathan Spencer, “Rites of Passage,” in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology* (2d ed.; London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 616.

³³ This describes a stereotypical coming-of-age rite. For specific examples, see van Gennep, *Rites*, 65-116. For a more recent collection of examples, see Glen Weisfield, “Puberty Rites as Clues to the Nature of Human Adolescence,” *Cross-Cultural Research* 31 (1997), 32-45.

³⁴ For a recent appraisal of van Gennep’s enduring legacy, see Perri J. Anttonen, “The Rites of Passage Revisited: A New Look at van Gennep’s Theory of the Ritual Process and its Application in the Study of

biblical studies if it were not for the work of mid-to-late twentieth century anthropologist Victor Turner, who was the first to apply the rite-of-passage schema to narrative criticism.

In his work among the Ndembu tribe of Zambia, Turner recognized how van Gennep's rites of passage schema could be used to explain the structure of the tribe's rituals.³⁵ His later application of this schema to illuminate *narrative* is rooted in further reflection on these rituals. Specifically, Turner argues that rituals serve an important communicative function within societies by transmitting "traditional knowledge" and lessons that the society considered "axiomatic."³⁶ In other words, Turner was convinced

Finnish-Karelian Wedding Rituals," in *Folklore: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies; Volume III: The Genres of Folklore* (ed. Alan Dundes; New York: Routledge, 2005), 178-92; repr. from *Temenos: Studies in Comparative Religion* 28 (1992): 15-52.

³⁵ Turner observed that when conflicts erupted among the Ndembu, they were accompanied by a four-stage process that addressed and resolved these conflicts, a process he referred to as a "social drama." Throughout the four stages of the social drama (breach, crisis, redressive action, and reintegration), individual rituals moved the process along. See Victor W. Turner, *Drama, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), 33, 38-41. Turner recognized that not only did the rituals performed in each stage of these social dramas follow van Gennep's tripartite model of rites of passage, but also the entire social drama itself followed this schema. His "breach" stage coincided with van Gennep's "separation" phase; his "crisis" and "redressive action" stages paralleled van Gennep's "liminal" phase; and his "reintegration" stage reflected van Gennep's phase of the same name. See Langdon Elsbree, *Ritual Passages and Narrative Structures* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 156-57.

³⁶ Victor W. Turner, *The Drums of Affliction: A Study of Religious Processes among the Ndembu of Zambia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968; repr. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 2.

that ritual “does not simply do something but says something.”³⁷ This conviction led him to compare the communicative function of ritual to other ways in which Ndembu and other tribal societies transmit axiomatic information, including through traditional narratives like myths, sagas, epics, and legends. Since ritual shared its communicative role with such narratives, Turner argued that the same rite-of-passage schema that had proven useful in his analysis of ritual could also be applied to these narratives—even if they had no connection to actual rituals.³⁸ Over time, his application of the rite-of-passage schema even expanded to include narratives that lacked a mythic, traditional, or folkloric origin. This allowed him, for example, to compare Dante’s *Purgatorio* to Ndembu ritual—which he justified by claiming that all narratives and rituals share the same “dominant symbols”³⁹ and arise from within the same “experiential matrix.”⁴⁰

³⁷ Robert A. Segal, “Victor Turner’s Theory of Ritual,” *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 18 (1983): 330.

³⁸ See, e.g., Victor W. Turner, “An Anthropological Approach to the Icelandic Saga,” in *Translation of Culture: Essays to E.E. Evans-Pritchard* (ed. Thomas O. Beidelman; London: Tavistock Publications, 1971), 349-74. Here Turner applies the notions of social dramas and the rites-of-passage schema to the traditional sagas of Iceland.

³⁹ Victor W. Turner, “African Ritual and Western Literature: Is a Comparative Symbology Possible?” in *The Literature of Fact: Selected Papers from the English Institute* (ed. Angus Fletcher; English Institute Series; New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 45-81.

⁴⁰ Victor W. Turner, “Social Dramas and the Stories about Them,” *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1980): 158. See also the work of Langdon Elsbree (*Ritual Passages*, 1), who appeals to the shared biogenetic origins of ritual and narrative in the activity and structure of the human brain as grounds for using rite-of-passage analysis in his reading of narratives.

Turner's appropriation of van Gennep's tripartite rite-of-passage schema to the study of both ritual and narrative is especially characterized by his interest in the stage of that schema that had heretofore received the least amount of attention: the liminal stage. In particular, Turner's research on the liminal phase of Ndembu rituals added significantly more detail to the description of this stage than that originally provided by van Gennep's work. For example, Turner recognized that a typical feature of this "betwixt and between" ritual stage was the inversion of society's typical norms. As a result, in the liminal stage of ritual a radical leveling of social hierarchies, which Turner refers to as *communitas*, took place among those participating in the ritual.⁴¹ Additional characteristics of individuals going through this ritual phase included minimization of sexual difference/asexuality, simplicity, acceptance of pain and suffering, sacredness, and the display of behavior considered "foolish" in normal society.⁴²

Turner applied this research on *ritual* liminality to his reading of *narrative*—again reflecting his conviction that ritual processes and structures can illuminate literature. Specifically, he sought to identify liminal characters, spaces, and situations in oral and written narrative. Liminal characters/spaces are caught between two worlds or states of

⁴¹ Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969; repr. New Brunswick, N.J.: AldineTransaction, 2007), 96-97.

⁴² Turner, *Ritual Process*, 106-7.

being. They are an amalgam that ambiguously mixes elements of both states, and they reflect a reversal of societal norms. Turner identified liminal themes and characters not only in myth and folklore (e.g., his identification of creation myths and trickster characters as liminal)⁴³ but also in modern literary works like *King Lear*, *Crime and Punishment*, and *Don Quixote*.⁴⁴

In sum, rites of passage that facilitate an individual's transition from one social status to another are universally attested. These ritual phenomena were first investigated and explained by van Gennep. They typically share a common structure consisting of three phases: separation, liminality/marginality, and reintegration. Turner's work was the first to apply this schema to literature, which he justified by arguing that both literature and ritual do the same communicative work and share the same foundation in the matrix of human experience. In both his study of ritual and narrative, Turner was most interested in the liminal phase of ritual, where the ordinary norms of society were reversed.

⁴³ See Victor W. Turner, "Myth and Symbol," *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* 10: 580-81.

⁴⁴ See Victor W. Turner, "Variations on a Theme of Liminality," in *Secular Ritual* (ed. Sally Falk Moore and Barbara G. Myerhoff; Aasen, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1977), 52.

1.2.3 Rites of Passage in Biblical Scholarship: Overview and Critique

Turner's application of the rite-of-passage schema to literature prompted HB scholars to search for the tripartite structure of rites of passage in biblical texts, including those with no explicit reference to specific rituals.⁴⁵ In some cases—most notably in the work of Ackerman and Mobley—the application of the concept of rites of passage focuses on identifying and discussing liminality, as Turner's work on narrative had done. Mobley, for instance, views Samson as a figure “defined by contradiction, alienation, and hybridity,” the kind of “neither here nor there” qualities commonly associated with liminality.⁴⁶ Similarly, Ackerman's reading of the History of David's Rise (1 Sam 16-2 Sam 5) is premised on viewing David and Jonathan as liminal characters throughout that narrative.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Jacob Milgrom's study of the priestly consecration ritual of Lev 8 is one of the few examples of rite-of-passage analysis of a text connected to an actual ritual practiced in ancient Israel. See Milgrom, “The Priestly Consecration Ritual (Leviticus 8): A Rite of Passage,” in *Bits of Honey: Essays for Samson H. Levey* (ed. Stanley F. Chyet and David H. Ellenson; South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism 74; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 57-61.

⁴⁶ Gregory Mobley, *Samson and the Liminal Hero in the Ancient Near East* (Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 453; New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 28. Mobley's reading provides important grounding for the analysis of the Samson narrative in chapter 5.

⁴⁷ Susan Ackerman, *When Heroes Love: The Ambiguity of Eros in the Stories of Gilgamesh and David* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005). I take issue with Ackerman's reading in chapter 3 (see 178-79), arguing that her application of the concept of liminality is too all-encompassing, resulting in what I call “pan-liminalism.”

Other scholars provide a more expansive application of the rite-of-passage schema—that is, one not focused solely on the liminal phase. For example, Hutton demonstrates that the story of David’s escape from Jerusalem during Absalom’s revolt, his exile east of the Jordan during that revolt, and his return to Jerusalem (2 Sam 15-19) precisely follows the tripartite structure of a rite of passage (separation, liminality, and reintegration).⁴⁸ Similarly, other scholars employ the rite-of-passage schema in their exegesis of important episodes in the lives of biblical characters—such as Jacob’s struggle with his mysterious antagonist at the Jabbok (Gen 32:22-33), Moses in Midan (Exod 2:15-4:29), Joseph’s early years in Egypt (Gen 39-41), and the escape by Lot and his family from Sodom (Gen 19:15-38).⁴⁹ Additionally, Hendel, Cohn, Talmon, and Propp apply the schema to the corporate experience of Israel in Egypt and in the wilderness.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Jeremy Hutton, “The Left Bank of the Jordan and the Rites of Passage: an Anthropological Interpretation of 2 Samuel XIX,” *VT* 56 (2006): 470-84.

⁴⁹ Respectively: Ronald S. Hendel, *The Epic of the Patriarch: The Jacob Cycle and the Narrative Traditions of Canaan and Israel* (HSM 42; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 159; William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1-18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 2; New York: Doubleday, 1998), 239-40; Susan Tower Hollis, “The Woman in Ancient Examples of the Potiphar’s Wife Motif, K2111,” in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (ed. Peggy L. Day; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 28-42; D. Alan Aycok, “The Fate of Lot’s Wife,” in *Structuralist Interpretations of Biblical Myth* (ed. Edmund Leach and D. Alan Aycok; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 116-17.

⁵⁰ Ronald S. Hendel, “Sacrifice as a Cultural System: The Ritual Symbolism of Exodus 24, 3-8,” *ZAW* 101 (1989): 375; Robert L. Cohn, *The Shape of Sacred Space: Four Biblical Studies* (AAR Studies in Religion 23; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1981), 13; Shemaryahu Talmon, “The ‘Desert Motif’ in the Bible and in Qumran Literature,” in *Biblical Motifs: Origins and Transformations* (ed. Alexander Altmann; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 50, 54; and Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 35-36.

In their view, the Israelites undergo a rite of passage by first separating themselves from Egypt through the symbolic act of crossing the Red Sea (alternatively, the separation phase can be identified as beginning when Jacob's family originally leaves Canaan for Egypt). Next, they spend forty years in the liminal wilderness, caught between their old status as slaves and their new status as inheritors of the land of Canaan. The Israelites complete their rite of passage when they enter into Canaan—a "reincorporation" that is also marked by a symbolic water-crossing, this time of the Jordan River.

Biblical scholars, therefore, have applied the concept of rites of passage to a range of biblical texts with edifying results. However, few scholars have employed the rite-of-passage schema to identify an individual narrative as a coming-of-age story.⁵¹ Instead, many scholars typically discuss the tripartite rite-of-passage structures in light of other rituals or transitions such as pilgrimage,⁵² purification,⁵³ royal installation,⁵⁴ or spiritual transformation.⁵⁵ The virtual absence of studies that apply a rite-of-passage reading to

⁵¹ An exception to this oversight is Propp, who briefly notes that the rite of passage that Israel undergoes in the wilderness can be compared to rites of male initiation in tribal cultures (*Exodus 1-18*, 35-36). He uses the same approach in his reading of Moses' experiences in Midian. I discuss the latter case in more detail below (see 45-46). Since my project is focused on individual characters, I will not treat Propp's reading of Israel's collective coming-of-age in the wilderness in detail.

⁵² Of the Israelites in the wilderness. See Cohn, *Sacred Space*, 13.

⁵³ Of the wilderness experience. See Talmon, "Desert Motif," 54.

⁵⁴ Describing David's exile and return to Jerusalem. See Hutton, "Left Bank," 480-82.

⁵⁵ Of Jacob at Bethel (Gen 28:10-22) and at the Jabbok (Gen 32:22-32). See Hendel, *Epic of the Patriarch*, 149-50, 159.

coming-of-age stories is especially noteworthy given that puberty rites were the most analyzed rituals in van Gennep's original work on rites of passage. Furthermore, for decades classicists and scholars of the ancient Near East have been locating coming-of-age themes in ancient texts with the help of the concepts of rites of passage and liminality.⁵⁶

Consequently, this research project is an attempt to fill a significant gap in biblical studies by reconnecting the rites-of-passage schema to the coming-of-age motif—the subject with which it was originally associated.⁵⁷ As such, this endeavor identifies and analyzes HB narratives that make use of the structure of a rite of passage as they describe a boy's transition from boyhood to manhood.

⁵⁶ See, e.g., the reading of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* as a coming-of-age story by Thorkild Jacobsen (*The Treasures of Darkness* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976], 193-220) and Rivkah Harris (*Gender and Aging in Mesopotamia: The Gilgamesh Epic and Other Ancient Literature* [Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000], 32-49). In classical studies, the effort to read narratives through the lens of the theme of initiation began in earnest with the publication in 1968 of Pierre Vidal-Naquet's "Le chasseur nor et l'origine de l'ephebie athénienne" (*Annales, Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 23 [1968]: 947-64), which argued that the Greek myth of the duel between Melanthos and Xanthos was an initiatory myth connected with the Athenian institution of ephebeia (an institution designed for the military and cultural training of young men). After Vidal-Naquet, classicists began to identify more myths with initiatory themes that they claimed were connected to coming-of-age rites. For a recent review of this literature, see Fritz Graf, "Initiation: A Concept with a Troubled History," in *Initiation in Ancient Greek Rituals and Narratives: New Critical Perspectives* (ed. David B. Dodd and Christopher A. Faraone; New York: Routledge, 2003), 3-24.

⁵⁷ In so doing, this project follows up on a suggestion by Susan Niditch (*Underdogs and Tricksters: A Prelude to Biblical Folklore* [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987], 22) that the rite-of-passage schema "may well be applicable to tales about maturation."

1.2.4 Methodology: Applying Rites of Passage to Biblical Coming-of-Age Stories

Two principles direct how the tripartite schema of a rite of passage is applied to biblical coming-of-age stories in this project. These principles provide an exegetical frame and hopefully prevent, or at least minimize, misuse of the schema. The first principle is: *while the presence of a rite-of-passage schema can help identify a narrative as a coming-of-age story, it does not provide sufficient evidence to make this case on its own*. Based on extensive evidence, anthropologists assert a nearly universal connection between the tripartite structure of separation-liminality-reintegration and coming-of-age rituals throughout the world. If the connection between *rituals* associated with the coming of age and the tripartite structure of a rite of passage is valid, it stands to reason that the rite-of-passage structure should be viewed as a clear marker of coming-of-age *narratives*. This conclusion is even more convincing if one follows Turner's claim that ritual and narrative arise from the same wellspring in human experience and therefore can be expected to share structural similarities.

However, even though the presence of a rite-of-passage schema is *suggestive* of the coming-of-age theme in narrative, it is not, in and of itself, conclusive evidence for this identification. Besides the presence of a rite-of-passage schema, additional corroborating evidence is needed to establish that a given narrative entails a coming-of-

age. One reason for this caution is due to the fact that not all rites of passage are coming-of-age rites. To put it differently, a narrativized rite of passage may reflect a number of other social or psychological transitions. Furthermore, the presence of a rite-of-passage schema is insufficient evidence to identify a coming-of-age story because this argument ultimately relies upon unverifiable assumptions and universal claims about the similarities of ritual and narrative (for example, that an author can structure a narrative according to a ritual completely unknown to her because the ritual's structure corresponds to a psychological pattern universally shared by all humans). To be sure, Turner's use of ritual structures to interpret literature is compelling and has produced insightful biblical exegesis. Nevertheless, it is not sensible to build a thesis upon such speculative and ultimately unknowable assertions. In short, a rite-of-passage schema merely aids in the identification of a narrative as a coming-of-age story.

The second principle concerning the application of the rite-of-passage structure to coming-of-age narratives is: *in order to identify a rite-of-passage structure in a text, each of the three phases of a rite of passage must be clearly visible and must take place in one pericope.*

The aim of this principle is to prevent the rite-of-passage template from being forced or

improperly overlaid onto a text.⁵⁸ Indeed, especially if the reader is willing to consider large blocks of narrative together (as opposed to just one pericope), practically any narrative with a beginning, middle, and end can be artificially subjected to a rite-of-passage analysis.⁵⁹ Moreover, liminality may be too easily read into any moment of discomfort or challenge in a character's story, resulting in a pan-liminalism that spans over the majority of a character's life—an undesirable expansion of a phase that is intended to be viewed as a temporary inversion of society's rules. By limiting the analysis to single episodes and insisting that each phase of the tripartite structure is equally apparent to the reader, this second principle guards against the danger of pan-liminalism and the over-application of the rite-of-passage schema.

In sum, the presence of a rite-of-passage schema is viewed as only suggestive of the coming-of-age theme in this study. Where it is present it can aid in identifying this theme, but without supporting evidence it cannot definitively prove this case. Moreover, the rite-of-passage schema can be completely absent from a coming-of-age narrative, as

⁵⁸ This is not to suggest that a narrator would not intentionally structure a larger, multi-episodic narrative according to a rite-of-passage schema. Indeed, the case made by several scholars for viewing Israel's wilderness experience in Exodus-Deuteronomy as a rite of passage is a compelling one. The purpose for limiting the rite-of-passage schema to one narrative episode or pericope in this study is instead to ensure against its over-application.

⁵⁹ The relative ease with which this can be done is demonstrated by Joseph Campbell, whose *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (3d ed., Novato, Calif.: New World Library, 2008) argues that *all* myths, hero tales, and folk legends can be considered a representation of a universal "monomyth" that follows the schema of a rite of passage (ibid., 1-32).

it is in four of the seven case studies of the coming-of-age theme identified in this study.⁶⁰ Finally, in order to prevent the over-application of the rite-of-passage template in this study, it will only be discussed in cases where each of the three phases can be identified within one pericope.

1.2.5 Male Maturation Rites as Communicators of a Society's Masculine Ideal

The preceding discussion traced research on the concept of rites of passage and its application in biblical studies and identified two principles guiding its use in this study. However, before proceeding to the next section of this introductory chapter, an additional tenet of anthropological research into rites of passage requires attention. Anthropologists who focus on coming-of-age rites of passage for boys have observed a strong connection between rites of passage that facilitate the transition from boyhood into manhood and the features of ideal masculinity in the society that performs the rituals.

⁶⁰ The case studies of the coming-of-age theme where the rite-of-passage schema is completely absent are: Solomon's coming of age in 1 Kgs 1-2 (discussed in chapter 3); Moses' in Exod 2 (see chapter 4); Samuel's in 1 Sam 3 (see chapter 4); and Jether's in Judg 8 (see chapter 5). Those which do contain a fully realized rite of passage are David's coming of age in 1 Sam 17 (see chapter 3) and Solomon's in 1 Kgs 3 (see chapter 3). Samson's story of failing to come of age in Judg 13-16 makes use of the concept of liminality derived from the discussion of rites of passage.

For example, in his research among the Nuer people of Sudan, Evans-Pritchard noted that an important moment in the male maturation ritual is the presentation of two gifts to the initiate: a spear and an ox. These objects symbolize the two primary roles that the Nuer society expects a man to perform: warrior and herdsman.⁶¹ A comparable example of the overlap between coming-of-age rites and the expectations for a man in a society is found among the Kabre people of Togo. Piot cites reports describing the initiation of boys into manhood among the Kabre in the 1950s when Kabre men often earned their living working on road projects funded by European colonialists. During this time, a portion of the Kabre maturation rite involved mimicking actions common to road construction work, such as erecting mock telephone poles and building makeshift bridges—a fascinating and unexpected association that linked modern construction practices with a coming-of-age ritual.⁶²

Besides indicating adult male roles, the connection between what a society values in an ideal man and the rituals for coming-of-age also explains many of the ordeals common to these rituals. Such ordeals range from the benign (such as a boy being called to read and interpret the Torah before his community during his bar

⁶¹ Edward E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), 254.

⁶² Charles Piot, *Remotely Global: Village Modernity in West Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 89-90.

mitzvah ceremony) to the traumatic (e.g., the Gisu practice of circumcising adolescent boys who must not flinch or show pain during the ceremony).⁶³ The function of these ordeals is to test the boy's "cultural fitness" to take on their role as men.⁶⁴ In the case of the bar mitzvah, the qualities tested are erudition and commitment to Torah study, both highly valued traits in traditional Jewish communities. The Gisu ritual tests a boy's ability to endure pain, which is an important part of being a man in this warrior culture.

Just as coming-of-age *rituals* reflect the values attached to masculinity in a culture, so too do the *stories* of a boy's coming of age. Indeed, the purpose for rehearsing the story of a boy's transition into manhood is lost unless the manhood displayed by the boy at the story's conclusion is recognizable in that culture. A Gisu tale of coming of age that ends with a boy displaying his ability to engage in Torah study, for instance, would be incoherent. In short, coming-age-stories provide a glimpse into the "culturally acceptable standards" for men and boys in a society.⁶⁵

⁶³ Jean Sybil La Fontaine, *Initiation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 124.

⁶⁴ Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making*, 126.

⁶⁵ Jennifer Rohrer-Walsh, "Coming of Age in *The Prince of Egypt*," in *Screening Scripture: Intertextual Connections between Scripture and Film* (ed. George Aichele and Richard Walsh; Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2002), 78. Of course, what is "culturally acceptable" and valued may change over time; but as it does, so too do coming-of-age stories. See also Sarah Iles Johnston, "'Initiation' in Myth, 'Initiation' in Practice: The Homeric *Hymn to Hermes* and its Performative Context," in Dodd and Faraone, *Initiation*, 160-61. Johnston argues that the qualities of bravery, initiative, and physical strength demonstrated by the divine initiatory hero in the *Hymn to Hermes* aligned with the expectations of manhood in ancient Greece. The initiatory hero Hermes expresses these qualities in the hymn by going on his first cattle raid; however,

This point is central for two reasons. First, it reinforces the claim that male coming-of-age stories provide a window into a culture's assumptions about masculinity. This again demonstrates the applicability of the present study to the ongoing discussion of HB masculinity. Second, the connection between rituals and stories of male coming-of-age and a culture's view of ideal masculinity provides a valuable tool for recognizing the coming-of-age theme in narratives. That is, if the values a society ascribes to masculinity are clearly identified, it is possible to know what characteristics of manhood are expected of a boy as evidence of his newly minted manhood in a coming-of-age story. For example, if a given society values horticultural skills above all other traits for a man, a story from that culture in which a boy plants his first crop could be read as the boy's coming-of-age.

For this reason, the next chapter begins with an analysis of hegemonic masculinity in the HB. By singling out the defining qualities of biblical manhood, it becomes easier to identify when a boy character begins to display characteristic signs of

Iles Johnson argues that "even in groups where boys did not practice cattle-raiding as part of their maturation process...the *myth* of the cattle raid would have remained meaningful so long as the qualities the raiders demonstrated continued to be among those that constituted manliness" (ibid., 161).

manhood in a narrative, which in turn facilitates the identification of the coming-of-age theme.

1.3 Identifying the Coming-of-Age Theme in the Hebrew Bible: Previous Attempts, the Present Methodology, and an Outline of the Argument

The previous two sections provide an overview of two fields of research external to biblical studies but with significance to this project. The present section departs from this discussion of the assumptions that underlie this investigation of the coming-of-age theme in the HB in order to elaborate more directly on the purpose, goals, and scope of the following chapters. The section begins by surveying the scholarship on male coming-of-age in the HB, and then it sets forth the criteria used in this study for identifying the coming-of-age theme. In addition, the differences between the exegetical approach of this study and that of prior works on this topic are highlighted. The section concludes with a statement of the goals of the project and includes an outline of the subsequent chapters.

As indicated above, the coming-of-age theme in the HB has received very little scholarly attention. This is especially true with regard to male coming-of-age—as opposed to female coming-of-age or the collective and figurative coming-of-age of a

group of people.⁶⁶ In fact, only three scholars, Hugh White and — on a much less detailed level — William Propp and Lyn Bechtel, have treated this topic at length.⁶⁷ Below, I summarize their research on male coming-of-age, which will serve by way of contrast as an introduction to outlining my proposal for identifying this theme in biblical literature.

1.3.1 Previous Attempts to Define the Coming-of-Age Theme in the Hebrew Bible: White, Propp, and Bechtel

1.3.1.1 Hugh White

In two articles published in the 1970s, Hugh White offered the first and, until this study, the only extended treatment of male coming-of-age in the HB.⁶⁸ White argues in these articles that form critics have failed to recognize the genre of the “initiation legend” in HB literature. To address this oversight, he identifies two examples of this

⁶⁶ The most thorough treatment of female coming-of-age is provided by Peggy L. Day (“From the Child is Born the Woman: The Story of Jephthah’s Daughter,” in Day, *Gender and Difference*, 58-74). Day reads the story of Jephthah’s daughter in Judg 11 as an etiology for a heretofore unrecognized life-cycle ritual among ancient Israelite girls. This ritual would have been designed to mark the transition of young women from childhood to the stage of בְּתוּלִים, or physical maturity (see *ibid.*, 60). Additionally, the attention paid to the related topic of the female life cycle and the terminology employed to describe each stage of that cycle has resulted in greater attention to clarifying the contrasts between girlhood and womanhood in the HB. See, e.g., the review of the copious literature on just one of these life-cycle terms, בְּתוּלָה, in Hilary B. Lipka, *Sexual Transgression in the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2006) 77-80, 92-97.

For a discussion of the figurative coming-of-age of the collective group of Israelites in the wilderness, see above, 27-28.

⁶⁷ Lyn M. Bechtel’s article (“Genesis 2.4B-3.24: A Myth about Human Maturation,” JSOT 67 [1995]: 3-26) is not solely concerned with male coming-of-age since it describes the maturation of two characters: one male (Adam) and one female (Eve). Still, since it is one of the few examples of scholarly research that touches upon male coming-of-age, it is considered here.

⁶⁸ Hugh C. White, “The Initiation Legend of Ishmael,” ZAW 87 (1975): 267-306; “The Initiation Legend of Isaac,” ZAW 91 (1979): 1-30.

initiation genre: (1) the story of Hagar and Ishmael in the wilderness of Beersheba in Gen 21:9-21; and (2) the binding of Isaac in Gen 22. In White's opinion, these stories narrate Ishmael's and Isaac's coming-of-age, respectively.

In his study of Hagar and Ishmael in Beersheba, White shows how the motif of a mother abandoning her child found in this narrative is also present in many Greek myths, which some classicists claim were originally told in connection with ancient initiation rites for boys.⁶⁹ White argues for a similar ritual context for the story of Hagar and Ishmael. He notes that Hagar's casting of her son beneath a bush (Gen 21:15), departing from him so as not to witness his death (v. 16), and their eventual reunion (v. 19) follow the tripartite structure of a initiatory rite of passage where a boy experiences a separation from his mother, a "ritual death" during the liminal phase, and a reintegration with society.⁷⁰ The association of this legend with a specific geographical location (the wilderness of Beersheba; v. 14) demonstrates for White that the legend was associated with male puberty rites performed at a specific cultic center in that area by Ishmaelite tribes.⁷¹ Finally, the report of Ishmael's future as a skilled bowman and of his

⁶⁹ White, "Initiation Legend of Ishmael," 268-76.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 301-3. White relies here upon the work of Eliade, who especially emphasizes the significance of death imagery in a ritual's liminal phase. See Mircea Eliade, *Birth and Rebirth: The Religious Meanings of Initiation in Human Culture* (trans. Willard R. Trask; New York: Harper, 1958), 13-20.

⁷¹ White, "Initiation Legend of Ishmael," 303-4.

marriage at the story's conclusion (vv. 20-21) signifies for White that the preceding narrative should be viewed as the story of the boy's coming-of-age.⁷²

White's reading of Gen 22 as Isaac's initiation legend similarly relies on parallels in Greek myths that originally may have had initiatory contexts, especially the myth of Athamas and Phrixus.⁷³ White claims that the motif of a father nearly sacrificing his son found in both Gen 22 and the Greek myth—like the motif of a mother abandoning her son—is connected to coming-of-age rituals and the stories told about them. He further asserts that the presence of two servants/boys (נָעָרִים; Gen 22:3, 5, 19) with Abraham and Isaac as they travel to Moriah points to an initiatory ritual context because in his judgment the term נָעָר can describe “recently initiated young men.”⁷⁴ In this view, the reference to Isaac as a נָעָר at the story's conclusion (v. 12) shows that he too has now transitioned into this new state—that is, he has ceased to be a boy and has become a “recently initiated young man.”⁷⁵ White also notes that the next time Isaac appears in Genesis he is shown doing distinctly manly things like getting married (Gen 24:67) and having children (Gen 25:19-26), which again may highlight a transition made in Gen 22.

⁷² Ibid., 293-94.

⁷³ White, “Initiation Legend of Isaac,” 4-10.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 14.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 17.

Finally, White connects this legend with a particular place—in this case, the mountains of Seir—and claims that tribal initiatory rites may have taken place in this location and provide the original context of the story in Gen 22.⁷⁶

White's work is admirable for drawing attention to the subject of male coming-of-age for the first time. Even so, a number of flaws in his argumentation cast doubt on his conclusions. To begin with, his attempt to describe the stories of Ishmael in Gen 21 and Isaac in Gen 22 as etiologies for tribal initiation rites relies on unsubstantiated speculation. In fact, as I show below, several pieces of evidence argue *against* the presence of such rites among ancient and proto-Israelites. Furthermore, White's appeal to Greek mythic parallels as examples of similar stories associated with initiation rites relies on a connection between these Greek initiation myths and puberty rites that is far from certain.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Ibid., 28-29.

⁷⁷ The movement in classical studies to identify the presence of initiatory rites in ancient Greece and to connect them to related myths reached its height in the 1960s and 1970s. In the last decade, however, many of the earlier conclusions on the question of initiatory rituals and myths have been challenged. In the introduction to a recent volume on Greek initiation, for example, Graf argues that with the exception of Sparta and Crete, "there is no institution in any Greek city that would fully conform to the anthropological definition of initiation" ("Initiation," 20). Moreover, Graf argues that a myth should only be considered an "initiation myth" connected to initiatory ritual in cases where it is clear that the myth serves as an etiology for a particular ritual (ibid.). He contends that these cases are "few," and the one example he gives—the Spartan myth of Leukippe (ibid., 15)—is a myth that White does not reference in either of his articles.

This questioning of the connection between Greek initiation rituals and myths, however, has not resulted in an abandonment of the search for initiatory *themes* in Greek myth. Johnston's work ("Initiation'

Another weakness in his argument is that Ishmael's story does not ultimately resemble a rite of passage. Although the tripartite schema of separation/liminality/reintegration is loosely present, thorough scrutiny of the Hagar and Ishmael story reveals important disparities between this story and typical male coming-of-age rituals. For instance, Hagar's actions do not reflect the characteristic actions of an initiate's mother. In Gen 21, Hagar actively separates her son from herself; whereas in an initiation ritual boys are *taken away* from their mothers by men, or separate themselves.⁷⁸ Moreover, in Gen 21 Hagar is the agent who effects the reunion between herself and Ishmael by approaching him to give him water (v. 19). However, in tribal coming-of-age rites the boys are the active agents of their reintegration with their awaiting mothers and other female kin.⁷⁹ Finally, Ishmael's age in this story would

in Myth," 155), for example, shows how initiatory themes could be present in a myth lacking a connection to initiation rituals.

⁷⁸ See the examples discussed by Weisfield, "Puberty Rites," 32-36. See also Robert J. Stoller and Gilbert H. Herdt, "The Development of Masculinity: A Cross-Cultural Contribution," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 30 (1982): 29-59.

⁷⁹ See Weisfield, "Puberty Rites," 38-39.

appear to be far too young for coming-of-age rites that typically take place in the early teen years.⁸⁰

Additionally, White's claim that the use of the term נֶעָר to describe Isaac in Gen 22 implies that he has transitioned out of boyhood lacks evidence. As the next chapter demonstrates, this term describes boys from a broad range of ages, including infants (e.g., Moses in Exod 2:6). Therefore it is not a term reserved for older boys and young men who have transitioned beyond adolescence, as White argues.⁸¹

White's contention that Gen 21 and Gen 22 mark the beginnings of Ishmael's and Isaac's manhood because the two characters are depicted as men the next time they appear in the narrative after these stories is also questionable. For this argument to be persuasive, both stories should immediately precede the recognition of the boy as a man, but in neither instance is this the case. Isaac's next appearance in Genesis (24:62) occurs

⁸⁰ White argues based on the chronology provided by the P source in Gen 16:16, 17:25, and 21:5 that Ishmael would have been approximately sixteen years old in this story, which would "make him the ideal age for ...a puberty rite" ("Initiation Legend of Ishmael," 302). However, commentators generally agree that P's chronology does not apply to the story in Gen 21, which comes from a different source that contains many indications that Ishmael is a young child. See, e.g., Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36* (first Fortress Press ed.; trans. John J. Scullion; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 341; Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (trans. John H. Marks; OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 228; Ephraim A. Speiser, *Genesis: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 1; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1981), 155-57. Indicators that Ishmael is depicted as being much younger than sixteen in Gen 21 include his helpless act of crying beneath the bush (Gen 21:16-17), his mother's ability to carry him on her shoulder (v. 14), cast him away (שָׁלַךְ; v. 15), and pick him up (שָׁאָה; v. 18), and that a term that is only applied to young boys is used to describe him (יָלֵד; vv. 14, 15, 16; see chapter 2 [119-22] for a discussion of this term's use to describe only young boys).

⁸¹ See chapter 2, 107-9.

after two lengthy intervening narratives that describe Abraham's purchase of Sarah's grave (Gen 23) and the introduction of Rebekah (Gen 24:1-61). Similarly, although the summarizing report of Ishmael's maturation (Gen 21:20-21) may directly follow after the story of his rescue in the wilderness, it is temporally removed from this scene by a significant amount. This detail is suggested by the narrator's note about Ishmael's growth (גדל; v.20), which is mentioned before any evidence of his manhood is provided, specifically his marriage and mastery of the bow.

Finally, if the Ishmael and Isaac narratives do in fact relate a boy's coming-of-age, the boy heroes ought to display signs of maturation and act like men. However, Ishmael's and Isaac's actions in Gen 21 and Gen 22 are anything but manlike. In fact, they are depicted as completely passive characters who are marked by helplessness (e.g., Ishmael's impotent cry from beneath the bush in Gen 21:17) and submission (e.g., Isaac's apparent willingness to be bound and sacrificed in Gen 22:9). These qualities, which are characteristic of *children* in the Bible, are certainly not those of men.⁸² Since neither Ishmael nor Isaac show evidence of any maturation towards manhood, these narratives should not be considered as coming-of-age stories.

⁸² For helplessness and submission as characteristics of children in the HB, see chapter 2, 110-13, 123-24, 129-30, 133, 134, 138-39.

1.3.1.2 William Propp

William Propp is another scholar who recognizes the presence of the male coming-of-age theme in biblical narrative and discusses it in detail. He briefly argues that Moses' sojourn in Midian (Exod 2:15-4:29) should be read as the story of his transition to manhood. Like White, Propp premises his claim on the recognition of a rite-of-passage schema in these chapters, where Moses is separated from his people (Exod 2:15), experiences a liminal period of his life during which he is imparted with special knowledge (i.e., Yhwh's name; Exod 3:15), and then returns to his people as a man (Exod 4:29).⁸³

Since Propp's reading is less extensive than White's, it can be analyzed succinctly. Like White, Propp is to be commended for highlighting this overlooked theme. However, his reading of Moses in Midian as a coming-of-age story contains faulty assumptions. First, the "liminal stage" of the rite of passage that Propp identifies is far too long of a period of time (referred to as יָמִים רַבִּים in Exod 2:23) for a stage that in ritual is meant to be viewed as a brief, intense, and often traumatic period where typical norms are anomalously cast aside. Second, and more significantly, Propp's logic requires the acceptance of Moses as somehow less than an adult man until his rite of

⁸³ Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 239-40.

passage is completed with his reintegration into the society of his fellow Hebrews in Exod 4:29. However, by every standard of manhood in the HB, Moses is considered an adult man by the end of Exod 2 when he gets married, begets a male heir, and is referred to for the first time as a “man” (אִישׁ; Exod 2:19).⁸⁴

1.3.1.3 Lyn Bechtel

The last example of a scholar who attempts to identify the coming-of-age theme in a biblical narrative is Lyn Bechtel, who reads the J creation account in Gen 2:4b-3:24 in light of this theme. For Bechtel, the actions of the man and woman in Eden symbolize the maturation of a human being from childhood to adulthood. She maintains that in this story the man and woman move from the carefree world of youth where death and struggle are unknown into the adult world of toil and the awareness of death’s inevitability.⁸⁵ Moreover, this transition is achieved through a rite of passage when the man and woman eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and bad, since this action entails a “symbolic death” (Gen 3:3) that recalls the death imagery frequently found in puberty rites.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ See the discussion of Moses’ transition to manhood in Exod 2 in chapter 4, 239-57.

⁸⁵ See Lyn M. Bechtel, “Genesis 2.4B-3.24,” 11-12.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 19-20.

As with the other scholarly attempts to locate the coming-of-age theme, this interpretation contains a number of problematic suppositions. Most notably, Bechtel's argument suffers from presentist bias in that the image of childhood as an innocent and blissful period free of the concerns of adulthood is one that only fits a modern Western context. As the review of biblical boyhood in the next chapter shows, this period is more frequently viewed in the HB as a time of great danger and vulnerability for the child. The transition out of this dangerous period would therefore be something to be celebrated, and not viewed as a negative development as Bechtel's reading implies. Furthermore, the realization of mortality would likely come quickly for an ancient Israelite child growing up in a world of high child mortality and short life expectancy, and thus would not be a significant marker of maturation into adulthood.⁸⁷ Nor should the agricultural toil that is revealed as a man's lot in life at the conclusion of Gen 3 be viewed as a marker of Adam's transition to adulthood since the HB indicates that boys in ancient Israel participated in agricultural work from an early age (see, e.g., Ruth 2:9; 2 Kgs 4:18). Next, since none of three stages of a rite of passage (separation-marginality-reintegration) are evident in Gen 3, Bechtel's argument for locating one in this story is

⁸⁷ This would especially be the case for a child growing up in an agricultural village context, in which the cycles of life and death are a daily reality.

indefensible. Finally, given that the main characters in this story are referred to as a man (אִישׁ) and woman (אִשָּׁה) before their expulsion from the garden (Gen 2:23, 24), their status as adults is already acknowledged well before the story's conclusion.

Although they deserve credit for highlighting a little-discussed topic, each of these three attempts to identify the male coming-of-age theme in the HB is premised on problematic assumptions and biases. The present study attempts to build upon these attempts and to advance scholarship in this area by avoiding these weaknesses outlined above.

1.3.2 Recognizing the Coming-of-Age Theme

In order to recognize the coming-of age theme, this study employs four principles that distinguish it from previous studies of this theme. These principles are also designed to correct the problematic assumptions of prior research.

However, it is first important to discuss a feature of this study that most distinguishes it from previous approaches, especially White's. In contrast to White, my purpose is not to argue for the existence of a complex of puberty rites in ancient Israel. Therefore, my identification of the coming-of-age theme makes no attempt to connect that theme with puberty rituals irrespective of their location—whether the location is: (1)

in the distant historical background of the narrative; or (2) contemporary with the narrative's composition.

I avoid linking coming-of-age narratives with rituals for two reasons. First, no evidence exists for the presence of puberty rites in ancient Israel.⁸⁸ Hypothetically, such rites could have existed because ancient Israel appears to have been a society defined by high levels of adult male solidarity. Anthropologists have demonstrated that this trait is a typical one in societies that have maturation rituals for young men.⁸⁹ In fact, some scholars have argued that circumcision may not have always been a ritual for infants, but may have originally been a puberty or betrothal rite announcing a young man's final transition to adulthood.⁹⁰ Even so, other evidence from anthropological research suggests that such rituals would likely not have existed. Schlegel and Barry, for instance,

⁸⁸ The Jewish coming-of-age rite of the bar mitzvah was not practiced in ancient Israel. In fact, it was only after the fourteenth century C.E. that the bar mitzvah celebration became a permanent fixture in Jewish community life. See Ronald Eisenberg, *The JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004), 24.

⁸⁹ Frank W. Young, *Initiation Ceremonies: A Cross-Cultural Study of Status Dramatization* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), 42-62. For a discussion of the solidarity at the center of Israelite manhood, see chapter 2, 91-93.

⁹⁰ See William H. C. Propp, "The Origins of Infant Circumcision in Israel," *HAR* 11 (1987):355-70; Nick Wyatt, "Circumcision and Circumstance: Male Genital Mutilation in Ancient Israel and Ugarit," *JSOT* 33 (2009): 411-12.

It deserves mention that infant circumcision does not function as an effective coming-of-age ritual because the infant is too young to be considered a man after the procedure. Bilu argues that because this ceremony actually encourages mother-child bonding (the newly circumcised child being returned to its mother after the ritual for special care and affection), it actually functions in the opposite way to a typical male puberty rite, which distances boys from their mothers. See Yoram Bilu, "From *Milah* (Circumcision) to *Milah* (Word): Male Identity and Rituals of Childhood in the Jewish Ultraorthodox Community," *Ethos* 31 (2003): 180.

show that in subsistence cultures (like ancient Israel), puberty rites are uncommon.⁹¹

Kimmel further argues that these rites only arise in cultures with a high degree of gender inequality, which does not adequately describe ancient Israel.⁹² In short, any attempt to identify a complex of maturation rites in ancient Israel is highly speculative. Therefore, it is ill-advised to attempt to connect the coming-of-age theme to such rites.

The second reason why I do not argue for a ritual context for coming-of-age narratives is simple: it is unnecessary, since coming-of-age stories can exist independently of puberty rites. No scholar of nineteenth century British literature, for example, would argue that *David Copperfield* requires a ritual context in order to be read as a coming-of-age tale—and indeed a tale that can inform the reader a great deal about Victorian England’s conceptions of manhood and boyhood. Even in the ancient world,

⁹¹ See Alice Schlegel and Herbert Barry III, “The Evolutionary Significance of Adolescent Initiation Ceremonies,” *American Ethnologist* 7 (1980): 710-713. For the subsistence economy of early Israelite settlements, see, e.g., Amihai Mazar, “The Israelite Settlement,” in *The Quest for the Historical Israel* (ed. Brian B. Schmidt; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 85-90.

⁹² For the connection between gender inequality and the presence of male coming-of-age rites, see Michael S. Kimmel, *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men; Understanding the Critical Years between 16 and 26* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 113. For the high levels of gender complementarity in ancient Israelite households, see Carol Meyers’ *Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). Meyers (ibid., 180-202, cf. 50-52, 121-22) argues that given the centrality of the household in the ancient Israelite economy, as well as the demands put on every member of a family by subsistence agriculture, women held a great deal of power in the agrarian households of ancient Israel.

stories like the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and the *Hymn to Hermes*, both of which contain coming-of-age themes, are told in societies that appear to lack puberty rites.⁹³

Arguably, societies lacking puberty rites are *even more likely* to have coming-of-age narratives. For instance, Gilmore demonstrates persuasively that societies without puberty rites produce adult men who are fundamentally insecure in their manhood because they have no clearly identifiable evidence of their transition out of boyhood.⁹⁴ In these societies stories of male coming-of-age could also be popular because they help address male insecurity about the status of their adult manhood by providing a model for the transition between boyhood and manhood with which men can compare themselves and their experiences.

Setting these concerns aside, the primary goal of this project is: *to argue for the presence of a literary theme of male coming-of-age in the HB.*⁹⁵ The following chapters identify

⁹³ For the lack of puberty rites in ancient Mesopotamia, see Harris, *Gender and Aging*, 3. For the absence of a initiatory ritual context for the recitation of the *Hymn to Hermes*, see Johnston, "'Initiation' in Myth," 155-57. The coming-of age themes in *Gilgamesh* and the *Hymn to Hermes* are discussed above, 29 n. 56, 35-36 n. 65.

⁹⁴ David D. Gilmore, "Introduction: The Shame of Dishonor," in *Honor and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean* (ed. David D. Gilmore; Washington, D.C.: American Anthropological Association, 1987), 14-16.

⁹⁵ Coming-of-age is reckoned as a "theme" in this study according to the definition of "theme" provided by Alter. A "theme" is "an idea which is part of the value system of the narrative [that is] made evident in some recurring pattern" (Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* [New York: Basic Books, 1981], 95). Examples include the reversal of primogeniture in Genesis, obedience and rebellion in the wilderness narratives, and

five narratives in which the transition of the protagonist from boyhood to manhood is a key concern. Of special interest are two additional narratives that offer an alternative approach to this theme—that is, their stories describe the failure to come of age.

As noted above, four methodological principles guide the effort to locate and subsequently analyze the coming-of-age theme. These principles are designed to add specificity to the search for the coming-of-age theme and to limit the tendency to force the theme on other stories where it is not present.

The first principle is that *terminology is an important indicator of the status of a character as a boy or a man*. In other words, when terms denoting the status of “boy” are used of a character (such as נָעָר or יָלֵד), the text views this character as a boy; similarly, when terms that denote manhood are employed (i.e., אִישׁ, גִּבּוֹר, חֵיל, גִּבּוֹר חֵיל), the character the term describes is considered a man. Therefore, noting when the terminology used to describe a character changes from boy-vocabulary to man-vocabulary helps identify a story as a maturation tale—especially if this switch takes place within a single narrative.

knowledge in the Joseph story (ibid.). In contrast, coming-of-age does not fit the definition of a “type-scene” where certain repeated elements are found together in a predictable pattern (ibid., 50). As I will show in the following chapters, there are no such repeated elements in coming-of-age narratives. Nor can coming-of-age be described as a motif (that is, a “concrete image, sensory quality, action, or object”) because coming-of-age is broader than a motif, which has no meaning of itself outside the context of the larger narrative (see ibid., 95).

Therefore, Propp's identification of Moses' return to his people in Exod 4:29 as the completion of his coming-of-age tale violates this principle, as does Bechtel's claim that Adam and Eve only mature upon their expulsion from Eden, because Moses has already been referred to as a man (אִישׁ) in Exod 2:19, 20, and 4:10, and Adam and Eve are called man and woman (אִישׁ and אִשָּׁה) in Gen 2:23, 24.

The second principle holds that *a coming-of-age narrative features a boy protagonist acquiring and/or displaying qualities associated with manhood*. An important part of a story that details a boy's maturation is to show evidence of that maturation through some coherent display of masculinity. Any story, therefore, that depicts a character who has previously only been described as a boy performing characteristically manly deeds is a good candidate for consideration as a coming-of-age story. Conversely, a story like that of the helpless Ishmael in Gen 21:9-21 or the passive Isaac in Gen 22 should not be considered a coming-of-age narrative because powerlessness and passivity are viewed as unmanly in the HB, as I show in the next chapter.

Given the ubiquitous association between coming-of-age rituals and the tripartite structure of a rite of passage—as well as Turner's argument that ritual structures can be fruitfully applied to narrative exegesis—the third principle is that *if this tripartite structure can be identified in a biblical narrative, it may signify that it is a coming-of-age story*.

Of course, the caveats mentioned above that guard against the overuse of the rite-of-passage schema serve to guide its application to the narratives examined in this study.

The fourth principle, which is closely related to the first and second, stipulates *that the changes that take place in a boy character signifying his maturation must happen within the borders of a narrative for that narrative to be viewed as a coming-of-age story*. Put differently, one cannot label a narrative a coming-of-age story simply because it precedes the moment when the text starts to describe the character as a man. The tale of Isaac's binding in Gen 22, for example, cannot be viewed as a coming-of-age story merely on the basis of some later maturation, which in this case is not reported by the narrator until two chapters later. A significant and recognizable transition within Gen 22 itself is required for the passage to be recognized as Isaac's coming-of-age.⁹⁶

1.3.3 Project Goals and Outline of the Argument

The primary goal of this investigation is to identify and explore the coming-of-age theme in key biblical narratives. However, this is not the only objective of this study. A secondary objective is to consider how the coming-of-age theme is employed by

⁹⁶ White ("Initiation Legend of Isaac," 17) argues that a significant change has taken place in Isaac when he is called a נָעָר by the messenger of Yhwh in Gen 22:12; however, as I will show in the next chapter, this term is associated with boyhood and not manhood (see 96-109). Therefore, its application to Isaac does not signify an important transition out of boyhood for the character.

narrators or redactors to highlight broader thematic messages in the historical narratives of the HB. For example, the analysis shows that the coming-of-age theme is often found at crucial junctures in the narrative in which an old era is passing away and a new one begins. Similarly, the *failure*-to-come-of-age theme is used in the book of Judges to indicate symbolically Israel's national predicament as a fragmented and immature political/religious entity.

As discussed above, coming-of-age stories also provide insight into the conceptions of masculinity within a society. Therefore, another secondary goal of this study is to analyze each coming-of-age story in light of the image of masculinity that it presents. This analysis will reveal that certain narratives—specifically the maturation tales of Samuel (1 Sam 3) and Solomon (1 Kgs 3)—evidence a view of masculinity that differs from that found in the HB as a whole and in the other maturation tales identified below. These observations, together with those on the narrator's use of the coming-of-age theme to highlight other points or important transitions, are typically presented in the concluding sections of each chapter after the primary goal of identifying the coming-of-age theme in a given narrative has been accomplished.

The project is structured according to the following outline:

Chapter 2 sets out the research premises by providing a comparison between boyhood and manhood in the HB. This chapter surveys each term used to describe boys in the HB, and it enumerates the characteristics that are associated with biblical boyishness. Additionally, the chapter sketches a portrait of how manhood is understood in the HB. This chapter is foundational because only after recognizing how boys are described in the HB as opposed to men can we locate the narratives where a transition is made from boyishness to manliness.

Chapter 3 presents the first three case studies of the coming-of-age theme: that of David in 1 Sam 17, and the two stories of Solomon's maturation in 1 Kgs 1-2 and 1 Kgs 3. These three stories are considered together because they narrate the coming-of-age of royal figures. After identifying the presence of the coming-of-age theme in each story, this chapter compares how the texts employ the theme and their separate and distinct understandings of masculinity. The differences that emerge (particularly between 1 Kgs 3 and the more similar stories in 1 Sam 17 and 1 Kgs 1-2) highlight a momentous transition in Israel's historical narrative and perhaps also in Israel's conception of masculinity.

Chapter 4 identifies the coming-of-age theme in the stories of two prophetic figures: Moses in Exod 2 and Samuel in 1 Sam 3. Similar to chapter 3, this chapter begins

by showing how the coming-of-age theme is woven into the narrative and concludes by comparing the two stories. After this comparison, the stories are set alongside those analyzed in chapter 3. The comparison shows that there are significant similarities between the coming-of-age stories in 1 Sam 3 and 1 Kgs 3 on one side, and Exod 2, 1 Sam 17, and 1 Kgs 1-2 on the other. These similarities and differences are considered from a thematic perspective and according to how they may indicate diachronic changes to Israelite conceptions of masculinity.

Chapter 5 examines the brief story of Jether in Judg 8 and the longer Samson cycle in Judg 13-16. These two narratives provide examples of the converse of the coming-of-age theme—that is, they tell the story of youths who fail to transition to adulthood. This chapter includes a discussion of why cultures would tell stories in which a boy fails to mature, and it shows how Samson’s failure to come of age is used to draw attention to broader themes in Judges.

The study ends with a review of the major conclusions reached in the preceding chapters. It also suggests possibilities for further research related to this topic.

Chapter 2: A Comparison between Biblical Manhood and Boyhood

In order to discuss the theme of a boy's coming-of-age in the HB, it is necessary first to have a clear understanding of what is meant by the terms "man" and "boy" in biblical literature. Without a detailed knowledge of the characteristics of boyhood and manhood, it is impossible to identify narratives in which a boy leaves childhood behind and is described as a man for the first time.

Therefore, this chapter begins with a critical summary of the recent research into biblical masculinity, in order to specify what it means to be a man in the HB. Next, a study of boyhood in the HB is offered. The chapter concludes with a comparison of the characteristic features of biblical boyhood and manhood, which establishes essential foundations for the investigation of the coming-of-age theme in the following chapters.

2.1 Manhood in the Hebrew Bible

In recent years, a heightened interest in investigating the characteristic features of manhood in the HB has emerged among biblical scholars, likely due to the influence on the humanities in general of the burgeoning field of masculinity studies—a field described in the first chapter of this study. One of the first works devoted to this issue

was David Clines' 1995 article "David the Man,"¹ in which Clines examines the narratives about this biblical hero and king in 1 and 2 Samuel in an attempt to identify the texts' assumptions about masculinity. Clines draws particular attention to 1 Sam 16:18, in which a servant of King Saul describes the young David to the king: "One of the young men answered, 'I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who is skillful in playing, a man of valor, a warrior, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence; and the LORD is with him.'"² Clines argues that this description, while not a "definitive summary of the characteristics of Israelite masculinity,"³ is a helpful place to start when discussing the topic in that it succinctly highlights three major features of an idealized view of masculinity in the HB: (1) a man must have the strength and potential for violence that is incumbent upon a warrior; (2) he must possess intelligence and wisdom, which is actualized in his "prudent speech" (נְבוֹן דְּבָר); and (3) he is physically "beautiful" (which 1 Sam 16:18 expresses with the phrase "a man of good presence" [אִישׁ תָּאֵר]).⁴

¹ Clines, "David the Man," 212-43.

² Scripture quotations from NRSV, unless otherwise noted.

³ Ibid., 227.

⁴ Clines (ibid., 227-28) notes that David's skill in playing a stringed musical instrument reflects an "essentially male trait" (228) in that of the more than 40 times that David's instrument of choice—the *קִנּוֹר* or "lute" (see 1 Sam 16:23)—is mentioned in the Bible, only once (Isa 23:16) is a woman playing the instrument. Still, Clines does not argue for musical talent as an essential ingredient of biblical masculinity *in general*; he merely argues that it enhances David's masculinity. Also noteworthy is that Clines dismisses the text's acknowledgment that Yhwh was with David as "an accidental feature of his characterization, more dependent on his role in the narrative . . . than upon the Hebrew construction of masculinity" (ibid., 227).

Later in this article, Clines adds to this list that the ideal biblical man is a “womanless male,” a man who prefers the company of other men and eschews all things feminine.⁵

In the years following Clines’ groundbreaking article, practically every scholar taking up the question of biblical masculinity has looked to the characteristics highlighted in that article (with the sole exception of male beauty, which has received very little attention) as their starting point. Indeed, the most recent volume on the subject features a collection of essays by a variety of scholars, few of whom significantly challenge Clines’ characterization of biblical masculinity and many of whom simply apply his observations to texts other than those previously addressed by him.⁶

Therefore, given the influence of Clines’ article, the four characteristics of biblical manhood that he identified are treated first in the following discussion. As that discussion shows, despite scholars’ frequent emulation of Clines’ work, not all of his conclusions stand up to closer scrutiny. Next, other important features of biblical masculinity that scholars have identified in the years since Clines’ article are outlined. In so doing, a portrait of biblical masculinity emerges that is essential for comparing biblical manhood with boyhood.

⁵ Ibid., 223-27.

⁶ Creangă, *Men and Masculinity*.

It should be noted at the outset that the masculinity outlined below is a *hegemonic* masculinity, consisting of an idealized and generalized conglomeration of features. Certainly, the overview of the major discoveries in the field of masculinity studies in the preceding chapter indicates the presence of alternate masculinities (subordinate, complicit, and/or marginalized) that may coexist within a culture and the mutability of the hegemonic articulation of a culture's masculinity over time. However, since the literature preserved in the HB is likely the product of elite urban adult males, the HB does not provide a reliable guide to these alternative masculinities.

2.1.1 Strength

The first characteristic of hegemonic masculinity in the HB that Clines highlights is the capacity to prevail on the battlefield: the biblical male is "the fighting male."⁷ Clines finds ample evidence of the importance of this trait in the narratives about David, pointing to the shockingly high "body count" attributed to David both in his capacity as king (approximately 140,000 enemy soldiers fall to armies that he commands) and through his individual actions (the deaths of fifteen different people are connected to him) to highlight its importance. Furthermore, two of the descriptors used by Saul's

⁷ Clines, "David the Man," 216.

servant to introduce David to the king in 1 Sam 16:18 stress this warrior capacity: David, the king is told, is a “man of war” (אִישׁ מִלְחָמָה) and a “mighty man of valor” (גִּבּוֹר חַיִּל).

Clines stresses that this quality is not only the property of David in the text of 1 and 2 Samuel, but that it defines what it means to be a man for every other male character in those books. The “language of strength,” specifically the strength to fight and kill another man, is found throughout the text as the touchstone of manliness.⁸ This is perhaps nowhere better stated than in 1 Sam 4:9. Here the Philistine army is stricken by a sudden fear after having seen the ark of the covenant enter the camp of their Israelite enemies. Believing that their chances of overcoming and enslaving their enemies had now diminished considerably because of the presence of a divine ally fighting with and for the Israelites, the Philistines nevertheless attempt to motivate and encourage themselves to go bravely into battle. They do so, significantly, by calling to each other: “Strengthen yourselves and be(come) men!” (הִתְחַזְקוּ וְהִי לְאֲנָשִׁים), and “be(come) men and fight!” (וְהִי יִתְּם לְאֲנָשִׁים וְנִלְחַמְתֶּם).⁹ According to this text, being or becoming a man is equated with being strong and specifically with fighting on the

⁸ See Clines’ extensive list of “strength language” in 1 and 2 Samuel (ibid., 218). Particularly convincing is Clines’ case that “the ‘hand’ as the symbol of power” functions as a veritable “leitmotif of the David narrative,” a claim in support of which he cites sixty-three individual verses.

⁹ Translation mine.

battlefield. It is further marked by strength of will and courage, the opposite of which is fear (1 Sam 4:7; cf. Judg 8:20).

In defining a man by his physical strength, evidenced through his fearless warrior's performance in battle, this text reflects its broader ancient Near Eastern context. Hoffner's article on the symbols of masculinity and femininity in the ancient Near East convincingly shows through the investigation of magic rituals that the symbols utilized in ancient Near Eastern society to represent masculinity are invariably military symbols, particularly the bow. Indeed, at times the equation of manhood and military prowess is quite explicitly drawn: the Hittite noun *LÚ-natar*, for example, denotes "masculinity" both in the sense of "male genitalia" and "military exploit."¹⁰ Hoffner finds the connection between the bow and masculinity in texts from all corners of the ancient world, including Greece (where the ability to string Odysseus' bow is the ultimate test of the masculinity of Penelope's suitors), Ugarit (Aqat's rejection of the goddess Anat's request for his bow is based on his conviction that the bow is for men

¹⁰ Harry A. Hoffner, "Symbols for Masculinity and Femininity: Their Use in Ancient Near Eastern Sympathetic Magic Rituals," *JBL* 85 (1966): 327 n. 4. One is reminded here of the similar connection between the Hebrew *קֹחַ*, meaning at times both "power" (as in Exod 13:3; Isa 10:32) and "penis" (Isa 57:8). See Harold Washington, "Violence and the Construction of Gender in the Hebrew Bible: A New Historicist Approach," *BibInt* 5 (1997): 330.

only [4 CAT 1.17: VI:39-41]), and also in Israel, where he sees this relationship at work in several texts (2 Sam 1:22; 22:35; 2 Kgs 13:15; Hos 1:5; Ps 127:4-5).¹¹

Hoffner's arguments for identifying the connection between military symbolism and masculinity are expanded by Chapman's *The Gendered Language of War in the Israelite-Assyrian Encounter*. Chapman's examination of Assyrian royal inscriptions and palace reliefs, with their frequent depiction of the king victorious on the battlefield, leads her to the conclusion that "the battleground was the performance venue for achieving masculinity, a place where [a man] fought and sparred in a contest of masculinity."¹² The triumphant Assyrian monarchs frequently ascribe to themselves titles that stress their might—Chapman notes that *zikaru dannu* "strong/mighty man" and *eṭlu qardu* "valiant man/warrior" are commonly used to identify kings.¹³ In contrast, defeated monarchs and armies are depicted as non-men, whose women are taken away by the more powerful and manly Assyrians,¹⁴ and whose bows are frequently shown broken and abandoned on the battlefield.¹⁵

¹¹ Hoffner, "Symbols," 329-30.

¹² Cynthia R. Chapman, *The Gendered Language of Warfare in the Israelite-Assyrian Encounter* (HSM 62; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 20.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 23-24.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 50-58. Again, biblical parallels are obvious. Yhwh is imaged breaking the bows of an army in Jer 49:35 and Hos 1:5, 2:20, which may draw upon this common image of emasculation to describe his complete victory.

Finally, the connection between physical power and masculinity is also evident in Sumerian inscriptions and texts. Asher-Greve notes that among the most frequently employed titles for Sumerian monarchs was “strong man” (nita kala-ga), while the word for young man (guruš) was written with the sign for “strong” (kala).¹⁶

In the years since Clines’ 1995 article, the relationship of masculinity with strength, fearlessness, and military prowess in the HB, as in other ancient Near Eastern literature, has been emphasized by other biblical scholars. Clines himself has recognized it outside of the Deuteronomistic Historian’s (DtrH) tales about David that were the subject of his initial article: in prophetic texts that emphasize Yhwh’s strength and the prophet’s own power,¹⁷ and in Exod 32-34.¹⁸ Haddox evaluates the men in Genesis based on, among other things, their embodiment of this strength-ideal,¹⁹ while Creangă’s

¹⁶ Julia M. Asher-Greve, “The Essential Body: Mesopotamian Conceptions of the Gendered Body,” *Gender and History* 9 (1997): 444.

¹⁷ See David J. A. Clines, “He-Prophets: Masculinity as a Problem for the Hebrew Prophets and Their Interpreters,” in *Sense and Sensitivity: Essays on Reading the Bible in Memory of Robert Carroll* (ed. Alastair G. Hunter and Philip R. Davies; JSOTSup 348; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 313. Clines singles out Isa 40 for special consideration, considering the prevalence of what he calls “language of strength” in this text, which features such terms as *בָּחַ*, *אֲדָנִי*, *חֵזֶק*, *זִרְעָה*, *זִרְעָה*, *רֵב*, *אֲנִי*, *אֲנִי* and *עֲצָמָה*. The prophet’s individual power is emphasized in Mic 3:8, where Micah describes himself as being full of power (*בָּחַ*) authority (*מִשְׁפָּט*) and might (*גְּבוּרָה*).

¹⁸ David J. A. Clines, “Dancing and Shining at Sinai: Playing the Man in Exodus 32-34,” in Creangă, *Men and Masculinity*. The slaughter by the Levites of their fellow Israelites and the military-style command structure presided over by Moses in these chapters contributes to an idealization of “the warrior male” in this passage (ibid., 55-56).

¹⁹ Haddox refers to this aspect of the hegemonic masculinity found in the Bible as “potency, including strength, virility, and skill as a warrior” (“Favoured Sons,” 6).

reading of the Joshua texts emphasizes the importance of the image of the “autocratic-warrior” to the construction of Joshua’s masculinity.²⁰

Frequently, the significance of warrior-like strength to biblical masculinity is mistakenly equated with “violence.” For example, Harold Washington writes that in the Bible “manhood entails the capacity to exert *violence*” both against men and against women.²¹ However, to the extent that “violence” is understood to mean “unbridled bellicosity” or “bloodlust,” it is inappropriate to equate the biblical ideal of masculine strength with this term. Doing so ignores the fact that self-control is also a frequent characteristic of the hegemonic masculinity found in the HB, as shown below. Furthermore, it disregards the fact that often disproportionate application of violence by men in the Bible is met with criticism (e.g., Yhwh’s condemnation of the unjust shedding of Abel’s blood by Cain in Gen 4:10-12 [see also Gen 9:6], the prohibition against murder in the Ten Commandments [Exod 20:13], and the legal establishment of cities of refuge to prevent the escalation of violence after an accidental death [Num 35; Josh 20]).

²⁰ Ovidiu Creangă, “Variations on the Theme of Masculinity: Joshua’s Gender In/Stability in the Conquest Narrative,” in Creangă, *Men and Masculinity*, 89-93.

²¹ Washington, “Violence,” 330. See also Clines (“David the Man,” 217), who defines strength in 1 and 2 Samuel as the capacity to commit “violence against other men.” John Goldingay (“Hosea 1-3, Genesis 1-4, and Masculinist Interpretation,” *HBT* 17 [1995]: 39) similarly argues that violence is a major feature of the biblical depiction of masculinity in Gen 1-4, citing Cain’s murder of Abel as an example.

Considering the problems with connecting the warrior ideal that characterizes biblical masculinity with violence, it is best to think more generally about this aspect of masculinity. Its true core is the quality necessary for every warrior, that of *strength*, both *physical* and *psychological* (i.e., courage). Certainly, this strength is often displayed in battle with other men, and yes, in the committing of violent acts against them. But the HB is far too condemnatory of wanton acts of violence to assume that unbridled aggression would be a feature of hegemonic biblical masculinity.

2.1.2 Wisdom and Persuasive Speech

The second characteristic feature of biblical masculinity that Clines identifies is persuasiveness and intelligence.²² These qualities figure into the description of David by Saul's servant in 1 Sam 16:18, where David is called "prudent in speech" (נְבוֹן דָּבָר). This "prudent speech" arises from a discerning and wise mind—the term NRSV translates as "prudent" here (נְבוֹן) is derived from the root בִּין, a root closely connected with the concept of intelligence and discernment.²³ Thus Clines argues that this quality be understood not simply as rhetorical flair but also as wisdom. David's wisdom and

²² Clines, "David the Man," 219-21.

²³ Note, for example, the frequency with which it is parallel to חָכָם "wise," as in Prov 1:5; 17:28; Isa 5:21; 29:14.

effective communication skills are evident throughout the David narratives.²⁴ Moreover, since these qualities are highlighted long before David becomes king, Clines argues that they belong to the description of his masculinity and are therefore not merely a part of the standard portrayal of kingship.²⁵

Following Whybray's assertion that wisdom is an important theme in the Succession Narrative of 2 Samuel and 1 Kings, Clines asserts that wisdom and persuasiveness also define the masculinity of other male characters in the story. By way of example, he cites Absalom (whose words "stole the hearts of the men in Israel" 2 Sam 15:1-6), Joab (viz., his use of the wise woman of Tekoa in 2 Sam 14 to achieve his ends), and the paragon of biblical wisdom, Solomon.²⁶

Few have challenged Clines on the assertion that wisdom and persuasive speech belong to the hegemonic view of masculinity in the Bible. Indeed, it seems to be applicable to other texts outside of the David narratives. That wisdom comes with

²⁴ Clines ("David the Man," 219), referencing Ralph Klein, cites David's persuasiveness at convincing Saul to let him challenge Goliath in 1 Sam 17:34-26, his defense of his choice to spare Saul after their encounter in the cave in 24:10-15, and his words' effectiveness against Saul in 1 Sam 26 that cause the king to admit his wrongdoing (26:21), as examples of his persuasiveness and intelligence prior to ascending to the throne. Citing Norman Whybray, Clines (ibid., 220) identifies this characteristic after David's coronation in a number of places: his wisdom is recognized and praised by the wise woman of Tekoa in 2 Sam 14:20; it is on display in his sending Hushai to confuse Absalom with misleading counsel (15:33-35); and its dark side is seen when David cunningly tries to cover up his affair with Bathsheba (11:14-25).

²⁵ Ibid., 219.

²⁶ Ibid., 220. Clines here also identifies wisdom as "part of the repertory of the powerful male" in ancient Greece, as seen in the character of Odysseus.

maturation and the attainment of adulthood is a fundamental tenet of the culture that produced Proverbs: white hair is the crown of glory according to Prov 16:31, a crown that gets identified with wisdom in 14:24; and the conceit of much of the collection is the imparting of wisdom from an adult to the young. Scholars provide other examples: In a later article, Clines reads Moses' negotiations with Yhwh on Sinai in Exod 32-34 as highlighting this feature of idealized masculinity;²⁷ DiPalma expands this to include Moses' ability to get concessions from Yhwh in the burning bush scene of Exod 3-4;²⁸ Haddox sees it as an important part of the representation of the Genesis patriarchs' masculinity;²⁹ and Creangă emphasizes the centrality to Joshua's masculinity of his role as a "student of Moses," able to articulate "well constructed arguments" in his interactions with the people he leads.³⁰ Thus, wisdom and its corollary in persuasive speech appear to be essential characteristics of manhood in the HB.

²⁷ Clines, "Dancing and Shining," 57.

²⁸ DiPalma, "De/Constructing Masculinity," 49.

²⁹ Haddox, "Favoured Sons," 7-14. Haddox does note, however, that at times the patriarchs fail to live up to the mark, as seen in Abraham's inability to dissuade Sarah from her harsh actions against Hagar and Ishmael in Genesis 16 and 21 (see *ibid.*, 7).

³⁰ Creangă, "Variations," 93-94. Examples include Joshua's persuasion of the Trans-Jordanian tribes to assist in the conquest west of the Jordan (Josh 1:13-18) and the use of the execution of the five kings of Makkedah (Josh 10:25, 42) "to convey, physically as well as verbally, the message of fearlessness and trust in the Divine Warrior fighting for Israel" (*ibid.*, 94).

2.1.3 Beauty

Physical beauty is the next characteristic that Clines claims is an essential aspect of hegemonic masculinity in the HB. Again, his claim begins with an examination of what he claims to be the pithy encapsulation of biblical views on masculinity in 1 Sam 16:18, where David is referred to as a “man of good presence” (אִישׁ תָּאֵר). Elsewhere, David is described as “beautiful of appearance” (עִם־יָפֶה מְרֹאֶה; 1 Sam 17:42) and having “beautiful eyes” (עִם־יָפֶה עֵינָיִם; 1 Sam 16:12). Noting that Saul (1 Sam 9:2), Absalom (2 Sam 14:25), Adonijah (1 Kgs 1:6), and—outside of the David narratives—Joseph (Gen 39:6) are all similarly complemented by the biblical narrator for their good looks, Clines adds this to his checklist of essential features defining hegemonic masculinity in the HB.³¹ Unlike the other three features Clines identifies as characteristic of an ideal biblical man, however, male beauty has not often been the subject of scholarly discussion or research and no one has yet seriously challenged Clines’ claim for its significance.

A closer look at the concept of male beauty in biblical texts reveals that a challenge is necessary. First, it is not entirely certain that Saul is praised by the text for being beautiful; his “goodness” (טוֹב) in 1 Sam 9:2 is connected with his height: “from his shoulders up taller than all the people.” Thus *imposing* might be a better understanding

³¹ Clines, “David the Man,” 221-23.

of what is meant by the term טוב, and this could highlight the significant aspect of biblical manhood noted above: the man's strength. Adonijah's attractiveness may well be the intended meaning for the claim that he was a man of "very good form" (טוב־תֹּאֵר (מֵאֵד); but this is mentioned only once in passing, not emphasized as it is for David, Absalom, and Joseph. For these three men, the text lingers over their beauty, significantly using the adjective יָפִיָּה (which undeniably connotes beauty, unlike טוב) in their description, and always adding further praise of their aesthetic appeal than a simple passing mention.³² Thus, if one wishes to investigate conceptions of male beauty in the HB, these three characters must be the centerpiece of that discussion.

MacWilliam's work recognizes this in his focus on these three characters.³³ Interestingly, his conclusions on the significance of their beauty differ significantly with Clines' argument that it is a vital feature of robust masculinity. Joseph's beauty, MacWilliam insightfully notes, puts him in harm's way in Potiphar's house and is a signal of his vulnerability. David's is cast in contrast to the hyper-masculine strength of those around him, like Saul and Goliath (e.g. 1 Sam 17:42); and thus it undercuts the

³² Absalom is not just called beautiful, but it is said that he was "praised" (הלל) for his beauty, and that "from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him" (1 Sam 14:25). Joseph is not just יָפִיָּה־תֹּאֵר (literally "beautiful of form") but also יָפִיָּה מְרֹאָה ("beautiful of sight/beautiful to look at").

David's beauty, as seen above, is highlighted in three different passages in 1 Sam (16:12, 18; 17:42).

³³ Stuart MacWilliam, "Ideologies of Male Beauty in the Hebrew Bible," *BiblInt* 17 (2009): 265-87.

equation of male beauty with muscle. His argument on the significance of Absalom's beauty is less persuasive, asserting without concrete evidence that his beauty "signifies tragedy" in that it "marks him out as a suitable sacrifice to expiate David's sin."³⁴

Despite the flaws in part of his study, MacWilliam's conclusions put Clines' equation of masculinity with beauty into serious question. Vulnerability is not a trait of hegemonic masculinity. Nor can the opposition to the idealizing of strength be said to exemplify masculinity. In fact, as is shown below, these are traits associated with *children* in the Bible—as is *beauty*. A closer inspection of each of these instances of the use of יָפֶה to describe a man reveals that his *youthfulness* is in view in the text: Joseph is still quite young at the time his beauty is discussed, perhaps still a נָעָר of seventeen (Gen 37:2); David's beauty is mentioned alongside his "ruddiness" (1 Sam 16:12; 17:42), a description that may carry the connotations of youthfulness, as is argued below (pp. 117-18), and is directly connected with his youth in 1 Sam 17:42. The description of Absalom's beauty in terms that hearken to youthfulness reflects a consistent effort throughout the text to cast Absalom's rebellion as a youthful indiscretion.³⁵

³⁴ MacWilliam, "Male Beauty," 283.

³⁵ David famously refers to Absalom as a boy (נָעָר) in 2 Sam 18:5, 29, 32.

Male beauty in the HB, then, is more a sign of youthfulness than of robust masculinity, as explained further below in the discussion of biblical boyhood. In associating beauty with youth, the HB is closer to the conception of beauty found in classical Greece and Rome. New Testament scholar Stephen Moore, writing in response to Clines' work, notes that in these cultures "male beauty tends to be the province of youths—youths who are looked at, desired, acted upon, mentored and formed by 'real' men who themselves are not ordinarily said to be beautiful."³⁶ Unfortunately, Moore uncritically accepts this as a genuine difference between the two cultures. Closer analysis shows, however, that Clines' position is deserving of critique in this instance.

2.1.4 Avoidance of Association with Women

Clines' final feature of biblical hegemonic masculinity is "womanlessness," that is, that the ideal man in biblical literature minimizes his contact with women, instead forming strong relationships only with men. Clines sees this operating in the David narratives in a number of ways: while David may have had many wives throughout his life, he claims in 2 Sam 1:26 that he has never experienced a love as wonderful as that of his male companion, Jonathan; David takes pride in the separation of himself and his retinue from women when on any military expedition (1 Sam 21:5 [MT 21:6]); and the

³⁶ Stephen D. Moore, "Final Reflections on Biblical Masculinity," in Creangă, *Men and Masculinity*, 249-50.

sexual contact between men and women in the David story—such as that between Amnon and Tamar, Absalom and his father’s concubines, and David and Bathsheba—generally leads to strife. Clines summarizes:

... the image of masculinity in the David story ... says loud and clear ... that a real man can get along fine without women; he can have several women in a casual kind of way, but he has nothing to gain from them except children, and he owes them nothing. ... A man does well to steer clear of women, a man does not need women, a man is not constituted by his relationship with women.³⁷

Similarly, Mobley notes that separation from women is the mark of the most masculine of men in the ancient Near East, as women function to tame and acculturate men, taking them out of the uniquely masculine world of the “field,” whether the wilderness or the battlefield.³⁸

Though Clines’ claim is that “womanlessness” entails a physical and emotional separation from entangling relationships with women, some biblical scholars—borrowing a concept prevalent in some major works of masculinity studies—extend the

³⁷ Clines, “David the Man,” 226-27.

³⁸ Gregory Mobley (*Liminal Hero*, 85-108) sees women performing this function in the *Gilgamesh Epic*, where Shamhat initiates Enkidu into human culture and Siduri’s reminder to Gilgamesh of the pleasures of life almost causes him to turn aside from his quest. He also notes that the practice of women greeting returning triumphant warriors from the battlefield outside the city, as in 1 Sam 18:6-7, shows that women had the responsibility “to convert [the men] from combatants to civilians” (ibid., 105).

idea to include the avoidance of being feminized or perceived as feminine.³⁹ Moore is representative of this group when he writes that “[t]he fundamental logic of biblical masculinity . . . is a binary logic: To be a man is not to be a woman. . . . In particular this means not being identified *as* a woman. . . . But neither should a man be identified *with* women.”⁴⁰

There appears to be a fair amount of support for the view articulated by Moore—namely, that biblical masculinity is defined by the avoidance of feminization (or the perception of feminization) as much as the avoidance of contact with females—when one considers certain biblical and ancient Near Eastern evidence. This is particularly true of battlefield imagery, where a common trope is the ultimate humiliation associated with feminization of male warriors. Hoffner mentions two Hittite texts that express this notion. One is a prayer to Ishtar of Nineveh that asks the goddess to take away the masculinity of the enemy’s warriors and force them to wear characteristically feminine clothes and headdresses while carrying a spindle and mirror, objects associated with women. The other is a self-maledictory oath sworn by Hittite soldiers; it states that, if

³⁹ For a discussion of the construction of masculinity in contrast to femininity, see chapter 1, 13-17.

⁴⁰ Moore, “Final Reflections,” 246. See also Haddox (“Favoured Sons,” 4), who argues that one of the “norms of hegemonic masculinity” is “not to seem feminine.” In contrast to this view that biblical masculinity necessitates eschewing all feminine qualities, Clines (“Dancing and Shining,” 59) argues that this may be the case in the modern world, but that in ancient Israel the social roles of males and females were so distinct that it was not necessary for men to articulate their masculinity in opposition to all things feminine.

they betray their warrior's duties, they should be changed from men into women and should be made to wear women's clothes and carry the characteristically female objects of the distaff and mirror.⁴¹ Chapman's examination of Assyrian reliefs shows that defeated enemy soldiers are frequently pictured naked and penetrated by weapons; she suggests that this is a visual representation of feminization curses like those discussed by Hoffner.⁴² Additionally, van der Toorn notes that in Akkadian reliefs, defeated male enemies are shown carrying mortars and pestles, a mark of their "complete effeminacy."⁴³

The trope of the feminized and humiliated warrior is also found in the HB (e.g., Isa 19:16; Jer 50:37; 51:30; and Nah 3:13). A graphic and detailed representation of such feminization is seen in the fate of the warrior Samson after he falls into the hands of his Philistine enemies. Susan Niditch shows that the hero's shaving functions as a symbolic castration.⁴⁴ Also, being forced to grind grain (Judg 16:21) feminizes Samson in two ways. It does so first by making him do traditionally women's work.⁴⁵ Second, given the

⁴¹ See Hoffner, "Symbols," 331-32.

⁴² Chapman, *Gendered Language*, 160-63.

⁴³ Karel van der Toorn, "Judges XVI 21 in the Light of Akkadian Sources," *VT* 36: 249, 252 n. 9.

⁴⁴ Susan Niditch, *Judges: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 170.

⁴⁵ See Carol Meyers, "The Family in Early Israel," in Leo G. Perdue et al., *Families in Ancient Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 25.

possible sexual overtones of the term “to grind,” he is feminized by becoming the subject of forced penetration.⁴⁶

Thus, in at least some cases, to be a man necessitates not being feminized or perceived as having feminine qualities. It should be noted, however, that in each of these instances from both ancient Near Eastern and Israelite literature, the men in question are warriors who have suffered defeat at the hands of their enemies or have been derelict in their military duties. Given that war was in general a distinctly male activity in the ancient world, to feminize a warrior through rhetoric, propaganda, or certain actions serves to insult him in that he is equated with the complete opposite of a warrior: a woman.

However, to assume based on these examples that all men at all times and in all situations must avoid any identification with feminine qualities is a leap too far. Indeed, it is not clear that when feminine imagery is applied to warriors the result is *always* to humiliate them. Bergmann has convincingly argued, for instance, that the motif of comparing a warrior to a woman *in labor* (eg., Jer 6:24; 30:6; 49:22, 24; 50:43; and Psalm 48:7) is actually a “badge of honor” for the warrior, as it elevates their suffering to the

⁴⁶ Niditch, *Judges*, 166-67. Niditch also recognizes a double entendre in Samson’s “sporting” before the Philistines (Judg 16:25), which further serves to feminize and sexually subjugate him.

level of a “crisis like no other” at “the threshold of life and death.”⁴⁷ Furthermore, the quality of wisdom, which is undeniably a feature of the hegemonic masculinity in the HB, is also frequently associated with women, such as the wise woman of Tekoa in 2 Sam 4. Indeed, wisdom itself is famously feminized throughout Proverbs.⁴⁸ Most damaging for this argument, however, is the realization that the ultimate alpha-male in biblical masculinity, Yhwh himself,⁴⁹ is occasionally described metaphorically with feminine imagery.⁵⁰ It is highly unlikely that a top priority of biblical masculinity would be to avoid all traits or tasks associated with women if such metaphorical imagery is

⁴⁷ Claudia D. Bergmann, “‘We Have Seen the Enemy, and He is Only a ‘She’’: The Portrayal of Warriors as Women,” in *Writing and Reading War: Rhetoric, Gender, and Ethics in Biblical and Modern Contexts* (ed. Brad E. Kelle and Brad Ritchel Ames; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 141-42.

⁴⁸ Linda Day (“Wisdom and the Feminine in the Bible,” in *Engaging the Bible in a Gendered World: An Introduction to Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Honor of Katharine Doob Sakenfeld* [ed. Linda Day and Carolyn Pressler; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006], 114-27) has argued that the wisdom tradition itself is closely aligned with the feminine.

⁴⁹ For an example of how Yhwh is depicted as the height of masculinity in Israel, see Susan E. Haddox, “(E)Masculinity in Hosea’s Political Rhetoric,” in *Israel’s Prophets and Israel’s Past: Essays on the Relationship of Prophetic Texts and Israelite History in Honor of John H. Hayes* (ed. Brad E. Kelle and Megan Bishop Moore; New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 174-200. Haddox argues that in Hosea the Israelite leaders breaking the treaty with Assyria have their masculinity challenged and are found severely deficient in the face of Yhwh’s “ultimate” masculinity. It is Yhwh, not the leaders, who performs the quintessentially masculine tasks of acting as husband to the leaders’ wives, breaking the bows of his foes, and exposing the cowardice and powerlessness of other men.

⁵⁰ Carol Meyers (“Female Images of God in the Hebrew Bible,” in *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament* [ed. Carol Meyers with Toni Craven and Ross S. Kraemer; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000], 525-28) points to several examples of feminine imagery applied to Yhwh in the HB. This imagery can at times be explicit (Yhwh is attributed with having birthed and suckled Israel in Num 11:12, will birth a new Israel in Isa 42:14, has maternal loyalty and compassion for Israel in Isa 49:15, and is famously described as רַחֵם in the creedal statement accompanying his divine self-revelation in Exod 34:6 [a term deriving from the word for womb]) but is at other times more subtle (Yhwh is frequently shown doing such women’s work as providing food and water, as in Neh 9:20-21).

freely associated with the mightiest warrior (Exod 15:3) and most powerful king (Isa 33:22), Yhwh.

The “womanlessness” of biblical hegemonic masculinity, then, should not be reduced simply to Moore’s definition of the man as one who avoids identification *with* and *as* a woman. More evidence exists for the former proposition (that men in the HB generally seem to prefer the company of men to women, as Clines shows with his study of David) than the latter (that being a man entails avoiding feminization, no matter how subtle). Indeed, the latter only seems relevant in a certain very limited sphere (the battlefield), and even there it is not entirely the case that the warrior must not be associated with women.

The question naturally arises, then, why biblical hegemonic masculinity would entail a general avoidance of women. The view associated with Moore would hold that to associate with women is to court feminization in the eyes of other men, but this view has been contested above. In light of the work of scholars like Nancy Chodorow and David Gilmore, as discussed in chapter 1, a different possibility is that the separation of hegemonic “real men” from women in the HB is a function of the need to avoid infantilization. As seen below, children are frequently associated with women in biblical texts. For a man to spend a great deal of time with women, then, implies that he is not

yet a mature man, capable of self-defense. Given the probable absence in ancient Israel of a system of maturation rites that prove to society that one is a man, the young Israelite man must be even more forceful in asserting his transition to robust masculinity on his own, and an important way of doing so would have been to avoid the society of women—an avoidance which would be reflected in Israel's literature. This need for men to avoid infantilization could be the motivation behind the common shaming practice of shaving the beard of a defeated enemy (e.g. Jer 41:5; 2 Sam 10:4) and is almost certainly the cause for shaving the head (Judg 16:17), or the head and pubic region of a conquered foe (Isa 7:20).

2.1.5 Characteristics of Biblical Masculinity not Recognized by Clines

In the years since Clines published his study of David, other studies of biblical masculinity have emerged that highlight features Clines ignores in his article, and have added further detail to the portrait of biblical masculinity. These features are self-control, fertility (specifically the production of legitimate heirs), marriage, honor, and kinship solidarity.

2.1.5.1 Self-control

The value placed on self-control in biblical masculinity has already been mentioned in the refutation of the importance of the pejorative “violence” to biblical

conceptions of manhood. It has frequently been noted that self-mastery is a central characteristic of Greco-Roman masculinity⁵¹ and is significant in early rabbinic texts;⁵² but it was not thought to be an important part of the masculine ethos of the HB until Mark George's convincing study of the "regimentation" of masculinity in the legal texts of Deuteronomy.⁵³ In George's view, the legal code of Deuteronomy sets up a regimented classificatory system that strictly regulates the social world of its audience and therefore is an invaluable source of information for the Deuteronomic views of masculinity.

For George, having "a name in Israel" (Deut 25:6, 7; 29:20 [MT 29:19]; see also 9:14; 26:19) is the central tenet of masculinity according to Deuteronomy's social vision. In Deut 29:16-20 (MT 29:15-19), the main task incumbent upon a man is to ensure that his name is not blotted out and forgotten. To ensure against this, a man must faithfully observe the regulations found in Deuteronomy itself. A basic feature of these regulations is that they limit excesses and recommend austerity and self-control. For example, the stipulations of Deut 14 restrict the foods one may eat; Deut 21:20 discourages gluttonous

⁵¹ See Stephen Moore and Janet Capel Anderson, "Taking it Like a Man: Masculinity in 4 Maccabees," *JBL* 117 (1997): 250.

⁵² As Michael Satlow has shown (" 'Try to be a Man:' The Rabbinic Construction of Masculinity," *HTR* 89 [1996]: 19-40).

⁵³ Mark K. George, "Masculinity and its Regimentation in Deuteronomy," in Creangă, *Men and Masculinity*, 64-82.

consumption of permitted food and drink; the sexual statutes found primarily in Deut 22 and 24 outline a system for keeping wanton sexual appetites in check; and the warfare laws of Deut 20 outline rules of engagement that limit gratuitous violence and, through the laws of the ban (Deut 20:16-18), the desire for plunder.

George's study is limited to the book of Deuteronomy, but his conclusions on the importance of self-control are applicable to biblical masculinity as a whole. Other legal materials outside of Deuteronomy, for example, similarly prohibit certain sexual acts (e.g., Lev 18), excessive violence (Exod 21:12-27), and eating certain foods (e.g., Lev 11). Likewise, the Deuteronomistic History condemns unbridled violence (Judg 19-21), the violation of the laws of holy war (Josh 7), and illicit sexual contact (2 Sam 11). Wisdom literature, especially Proverbs, repeatedly recommends a life of sober self-control (e.g., Prov 6:24-35; 20:1; 23:20-21); and the prophetic books contain frequent proclamations against violence (e.g., Amos 1; Nah 3) and the unchecked desire for wealth (Amos 4:1; 5:11-12). Therefore, it is appropriate to consider self-control among the fundamental characteristics of ideal biblical masculinity.

2.1.5.2 Fertility and marriage

George's emphasis on the importance of "having a name in Israel" leads to the next major characteristic of biblical masculinity, one also recognized by other biblical

and ancient Near Eastern scholars: virility and the production of offspring. George notes that the laws of levirate marriage (Deut 25:5-10) speak to this concern, as the purpose of a deceased man's brother producing offspring with his widow is to ensure that his name is not "blotted out from Israel" (25:6).⁵⁴ Thus, having children is an essential feature of "having a name in Israel" and therefore of being a man. In addition, Hoffner stresses the "double reference" evident in the meaning of the use of weaponry, particularly the bow, to symbolize masculinity in the ancient Near East. He argues that weaponry is a potent symbol for ancient Near Eastern masculinity because it represents two significant criteria for manhood, battlefield valor and fertility.⁵⁵ He points to Ps 127:4-5a ("Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the sons of one's youth/ Happy is the man who has a quiver full of them.") as evidence of this equation between weaponry and fertility in ancient Israel as well.

This emphasis on fertility requires qualification. Heedlessly fathering many children by random women is not advocated in the HB; rather, the goal of manly virility was the production of legitimate male heirs. Thus, a man's fertility should be expressed within the framework of marriage. Illegitimate children of Israelite men are excluded from the assembly of Yhwh in Deut 23:2 (MT 23:3) and therefore cannot inherit the

⁵⁴ Ibid., 75.

⁵⁵ Hoffner, "Symbols," 397.

paternal נַחֲלָה (“inheritance”). George therefore argues that marriage is “the basic social situation in which Deuteronomy understands men to live.”⁵⁶ This is also the case outside of the Deuteronomic literature: marriage is the first, foundational social institution in Gen 2:24; and the ubiquity of marriage in the HB is emphasized by the fact that of the many Israelite men in the HB, only Jeremiah is explicitly identified as unmarried throughout his life. Furthermore, while exogamy is not totally prohibited, the HB generally discourages marriage to—and consequently reproduction with—foreign women.⁵⁷ Therefore, an ideal biblical man is expected not only to be fertile, but also to be legitimately *married*, preferably to an Israelite woman.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ George, “Regimentation,” 73. Illegitimacy is generally dissuaded outside of the Torah as well, as the Jephthah tale of Judg 11 shows.

⁵⁷ See Victor P. Hamilton, “Marriage (OT and ANE),” *ABD* 4:563-65.

⁵⁸ It is important to note that while fertility and marriage are crucial features of idealized biblical masculinity, a man does not need to be married with children in order to be considered a man. For example, even though Abraham does not reproduce until Gen 16, he is still considered a man before this time, engaging in war (Gen 14), exerting authority over his extended family and servants (Gen 12:5) and wisely deciding to prevent conflict between his herdsmen and Lot’s by separating with his nephew (Gen 13). Similarly, Jeremiah never marries and remains childless, but is still considered a “man” (יָמָא; e.g., Jer 15:10; 26:11). Thus, as aspects of the hegemonic ideal of masculinity, marriage and children certainly enhance one’s masculinity—i.e., the married and fertile man is “more of a man” than an unmarried and infertile man—but their absence does not mean that one has not attained manhood (see also the discussion of “legal manhood” below [93-94]).

In defending this point, this study disagrees with the recent claim by Naomi Steinberg (*The World of the Child in the Hebrew Bible* [Hebrew Bible Monographs 51; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2013], 76, 91) that having children, particularly a male heir, was the only way an ancient Israelite man could transition from the social category of childhood to adulthood. Steinberg’s study of children in the biblical world is to be commended on many levels. Among its strengths are its challenge of the modern idealization of youth as a carefree time of innocence and protection from emotional and physical harm (*ibid.*, 3-10) and its discussion of the non-personhood of a child until circumcision for a boy or the third week of life for a girl (*ibid.*, 69-70).

2.1.5.3 Honor

Another characteristic of biblical masculinity highlighted by scholars in recent years is honor. One of the earliest studies to draw attention to the importance of honor to masculinity in the HB was Stone's *Sex, Honor, and Power in the Deuteronomistic History*, which examines how men in the Deuteronomistic History use sexual relations with women as a way to attain and defend their honor.⁵⁹ Other examples include the work of Haddox and Chapman, who separately discuss how honor provides the ideological foundation for the prophetic metaphors of Yhwh as a cuckolded husband avenging the insult to his honor against his unfaithful wife.⁶⁰ Clines, in an article published after

While she persuasively answers the question of when personhood (and therefore "childhood") begins, her claim that childhood ends only when one has reproduced is not convincing. Indeed, this argument seems only based on the fact that the noun **נָעַר**, typically used for young boys, is employed to describe Naomi's sons Mahlon and Chilion in Ruth 1:5. Since these two young men are married but childless, the application of this noun to describe them suggests for Steinberg that it is only the reproduction of children that changes a person's status from child to adult (ibid., 35, 39). This evidence leads her to argue that, for example, Isaac and Rebekah do not achieve "full adulthood" until Jacob and Esau are born, nor do Abraham and Sarah mature completely until Isaac's birth; see, respectively, 76, 91. Furthermore, in basing her claims on evidence from Ruth 1:5, Steinberg neglects the arguments that see the use of **נָעַר** in this verse as a narrative device designed to emphasize the redress of Naomi's loss by the end of the book (see below, 120-21). Moreover, her argument that only reproduction brings about adult manhood disregards the notion of "legal manhood" at age twenty and the evidence of Abraham's manliness prior to begetting children (see above).

⁵⁹ Kenneth A. Stone, *Sex, Honor, and Power in the Deuteronomistic History* (JSOTSup 234; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1996), 11.

⁶⁰ Haddox, "(E) Masculinity," 174-200; Chapman, *Gendered Language*, 64. Chapman's book also discusses the honor-laden metaphor of Yhwh as a father protecting daughter Zion (see ibid., 60-111). For a contrasting view on the significance of honor to the Yhwh-Israel marriage metaphor, see Carol Meyers, "Rape or

“David the Man,” stresses the importance of honor language in the prophetic literature, and connects this to “male values” and “male ideology.”⁶¹ Most recently, Lazarewicz-Wyrzykowska demonstrates that the struggle to gain honor is a central concern of the Samson narratives.⁶²

In arguing for the importance of honor to HB masculinity, these scholars often draw on research into honor (and its counterpart, shame) in cultural anthropology—the field in which the initial study of the concept was undertaken.⁶³ According to its original description by anthropologists in the mid-twentieth century, honor is a quality that in certain societies determines a man’s reputation and self-worth.⁶⁴ Honor can be both *ascribed* to a man by the circumstances of his birth or his office/occupation, or it can be

Remedy: Sex and Violence in Prophetic Marriage Metaphors,” in *Prophetie in Israel* (Beiträge des Symposiums “Das Alte Testament und die Kultur der Moderne,” anlässlich des 100. Geburtstags Gerhard von Rads [1901-1971], Heidelberg, 18.21 Oktober 2001; ed. Hugh Williamson, Konrad Schmid, and Irmtraud Fischer; Münster: Lit-Verlag, 2003), 198. Meyers argues that what is “at stake” in the case of an adulterous wife is not her husband’s honor but instead “the possibility of a disruption of the biological continuity of the ownership of the family property and thus of survival.”

⁶¹ Clines, “He-Prophets,” 316.

⁶² Ela Lazarewicz-Wyrzykowska, “Samson: Masculinity Lost (and Regained?)” in Creangă, *Men and Masculinity*, 171-88.

⁶³ Note, e.g., that Stone (*Sex, Honor, and Power*, 27-49) devotes a chapter of his book to summarizing this research. For an overview of the impact of research into honor and shame on New Testament studies, see Halvor Moxnes, “Honor and Shame,” in *The Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation* (ed. Richard L. Rohrbaugh; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1996), 19-40.

⁶⁴ See John G. Peristiany, ed., *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966). Peristiany’s edited volume was the first extended study of honor and shame in the field of cultural anthropology.

acquired by taking it from other men through competition. This competition can take several forms (e.g., athletic, martial, economic, verbal); however, it is most commonly sexual in nature.⁶⁵ A man increases his honor by protecting the chastity of the women in his family (mother, wife, sisters, daughters) while through his own sexual conquests simultaneously violating the chastity and fidelity of the women under the protection of another man. Female sexual fidelity/chastity therefore becomes the “currency and measurement” of honor among men.⁶⁶ The result of this incessant competition for honor between men is the creation of what Peristiany refers to as an “agonistic culture,” wherein individual men feel obligated to assert and defend their precarious masculinity against other men with the same goal.⁶⁷

Scholars of biblical masculinity have focused on this “agonistic” aspect of honor that creates a culture of endless and divisive male competition, particularly sexual competition. For example, Stone’s work, together with that of Chapman and Haddox,

⁶⁵ Note, however, that the competition must take place between equals. For a man of great honor with an exalted status in his society to accept the challenge of an inferior would reflect poorly on him and would decrease his honor, even if he emerged successful from the competition. See Pierre Bourdieu, “The Sentiment of Honour in Kayble Society,” in Peristiany, *Honour and Shame*, 197-98.

⁶⁶ Gilmore, “The Shame of Dishonor,” 4.

⁶⁷ Peristiany, *Honour and Shame*, 14.

emphasizes the importance of sex to the pursuit and defense of honor.⁶⁸ However, the focus on sexual competition common to the initial anthropological research on manly honor in the mid-twentieth century has been questioned by more recent work on the subject by cultural anthropologists. Scholars like Gilmore and Herzfeld argue for the inclusion of values such as hospitality and cooperation into the overall description of honor because they recognize that the kind of intensely agonistic society envisioned by earlier scholars of honor and shame could not be sustained without other values that stress societal cohesion.⁶⁹ Moreover, decades after editing the initial volume on honor and shame in the mid-twentieth century, Peristiany returned to the subject of honor and significantly reformulated his original position to include “grace” (i.e., honor as virtue) in his understanding of masculine honor.⁷⁰ Few scholars of masculinity in the HB, however, have given attention to these more positive and socially constructive values.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Lazarewicz –Wyrzykowska (“Samson,” 172) also emphasizes the “strong link” between honor and male sexual competition.

⁶⁹ David D. Gilmore, “Honor, Honesty, Shame: Male Status in Contemporary Andalusia,” in Gilmore, *Honor*, 90-103; Michael Herzfeld, “‘As in Your Own House’: Hospitality, Ethnography, and the Stereotype of Mediterranean Society,” in Gilmore, *Honor*, 75-89.

⁷⁰ John G. Peristiany and Julian Pitt-Rivers, eds., *Honour and Grace in Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). See especially Julian Pitt-Rivers, “Postscript: The Place of Grace in Anthropology,” in *ibid.*, 215-46.

⁷¹ An example of the inability to reconcile masculine honor with social cohesion is found in David J. A. Clines’ “Being a Man in the Book of the Covenant,” in *Reading the Law: Studies in Honour of Gordon J. Wenham* (ed. J. G. McConville and Karl Möller; Library of Hebrew Bible/ Old Testament Studies 461; New York: T&T Clark, 2007). Here, Clines argues that because the goal of the Book of the Covenant is to build a community

Another issue in the appropriation of anthropological research on honor and shame scholarship by scholars of HB masculinity is that much of the work by biblical scholars on the role of honor and shame in the construction of masculinity focuses on individual men in the HB. The attention to the individual overlooks the fact that honor and shame systems typically belong to societies that are not premised on individualism, but instead on families, clans, and lineages. The importance of kinship in these societies was recognized from the inception of study of honor and shame. Zayid's essay in the original volume on the subject, for instance, noted that among the Bedouin of Egypt "it can be said that the study of honor and shame...is to a great extent a study of the bonds and values of kinship."⁷²

Despite these oversights in the application of anthropological research on masculine honor, scholars of biblical masculinity are still right to consider honor an important feature of biblical masculinity. The frequency with which the term כְּבוֹד

centered on manly solidarity (i.e., a "band of brothers"), the text articulates a vision of society free of notions of honor and shame (ibid., 4). A notable exception to this tendency is Haddox's "Favoured Sons," which describes the importance of "positive" values like generosity and hospitality to honor in Genesis; see Haddox, "Favoured Sons," 16.

⁷² Abou A. M. Zeid, "Honour and Shame among the Bedouins of Egypt," in Peristiany, *Honour and Shame*, 250.

(which Clines considers the most significant term for describing honor in the HB)⁷³ is associated with other characteristically manly features strongly suggests that it is be considered together with them as constituent of hegemonic biblical masculinity. For example, it is paralleled with manly strength (גְּבוּרָה) in Ps 145:11 and with weaponry in Job 29:20 and Ps 3:3 (MT 3:4), and it is equated with military might in Isa 21:16. Honor is also often connected to social authority—another fundamental feature of biblical masculinity—since it is owed to authoritative figures like kings (Isa 14:18; Ps 21:5:6), priests (Exod 28:2, 40), and the wise (Prov 3:35).

For the purposes of this study, therefore, honor is considered a feature of biblical hegemonic masculinity.⁷⁴ However, the broader definition of honor informed by more recent anthropological research is employed. This means that while an idealized biblical man may engage in sexual competition with other men to gain honor, he is just as likely to acquire honor through values that promote social cohesion such as hospitality or grace. Moreover, he is not only concerned with his own individual honor but also with the honor of his kin. In the case of the Israelite culture that produced the HB, this kinship can be reckoned on the small scale (one's individual family unit or בֵּית אָב) or on

⁷³ Clines, "He-Prophets," 317.

⁷⁴ It is important to note, however, that ancient Israel need not be considered an "honor-shame culture" like those studied by modern anthropologists in order for honor to be considered an important masculine value found in its literature. See Clines, "He-Prophets," 316.

the large scale (the entire people of Israel, whose unity is frequently described in kinship terms).⁷⁵

2.1.5.4 Kinship solidarity

The next characteristic of biblical masculinity that scholars have identified since Clines' original discussion of the subject is closely related to the characteristic of honor just mentioned. The biblical man stands in close solidarity with his fellow kinsmen.

Clines, in fact, recognized the importance of male solidarity in "David the Man" since he briefly mentions "male bonding" there as a characteristic feature of masculinity.⁷⁶ He develops this theme in greater detail in a later article on the Book of the Covenant in Exodus (Exod 20:22-23:1), a legal text which he claims envisions a unified society of closely allied men, referred to as neighbors (רֵעִים), who value the needs of corporate whole above their individual desires.⁷⁷ However, in both of these articles Clines asserts that this "bonding" is unconnected to kinship.⁷⁸

This separation of male solidarity and kinship is called into question when considering the growing scholarly consensus on the significance of kinship and kinship

⁷⁵ For a discussion of the kinship language employed to describe Israel as a whole, see Frank Moore Cross, *From Epic to Canon: History and Literature in Ancient Israel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 3-21.

⁷⁶ Clines, "David the Man," 223-25.

⁷⁷ Clines, "Being a Man," 4-5.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 4. Clines, "David the Man," 224-25.

language in the world of the HB. Perdue, for example, argues that kinship solidarity is a fundamental value in the society that produced the biblical texts, and that this solidarity extended beyond the individual family unit: "...the ethics of solidarity shaped a network of understanding and care that moved beyond the immediate compound family to include clans, tribes, and the totality of the 'children of Israel'."⁷⁹ This emphasis on kinship solidarity is the motivating force behind several distinctive features of biblical law like levirate marriage or the responsibility to redeem a kinsman's land, property, or person (i.e., the responsibility of the *ḥabīb*; e.g., Lev 25:25-55). Furthermore, Cross shows that kinship language is central to the notion of the covenant between Yhwh and his people.⁸⁰

Therefore, the ideal biblical man stands in solidarity with his fellow Israelites, who are reckoned as his kin. While this solidarity certainly extends to women and children, given the general avoidance of association with women described above, as well as the androcentric bias of the HB, this solidarity is most often displayed in the HB as solidarity among men.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Leo G. Perdue, "The Israelite and Early Jewish Family: Summary and Conclusions," in Perdue et al., *Families in Ancient Israel*, 167.

⁸⁰ For the connection between covenant and kinship, see Cross, *From Epic to Canon*, 13.

⁸¹ Note also that Steinberg (*World of the Child*, 73) argues for the significance of an ancient Israelite child's identification with the kinship group as essential to the child's maturation. She asserts that "...childhood in

2.1.5.5 Legal manhood

Finally, it should be noted that, regardless of whether a man embodies the ideals of hegemonic masculinity outlined above (including marriage and children), he is legally considered a man at age twenty according to several biblical legal texts.⁸² At this age of legal majority, a man is eligible for military service (Num 1:3, 18; 26:2; 2 Chr 25:5) and taxation (Exod 30:14), and can be considered guilty of immoral choices and actions (Num 14:29; 32:11).⁸³ The valuation tables of Lev 27 similarly distinguish the twentieth birthday as the border between childhood and adulthood for both men and women in that the value of an individual at that age changes from twenty shekels (a person's value between the ages of five and twenty) to thirty shekels. The same tables put the upper

ancient Israel was a transitional stage in an individual's social journey towards full incorporation into the family household and patrilineage. In contrast to the construction of childhood in the contemporary West, childhood in biblical Israel was not about developing one's individuality and learning to speak one's mind; instead it was about learning to think like the group and to put group interests before individual ones." Steinberg's contention further strengthens the claim that biblical manhood entails solidarity among adult men.

⁸² Steinberg neglects the importance of age in establishing "legal manhood," which leads her to having to defend the claim that Abraham is not considered a man until he reproduces in Gen 16, despite significant evidence to the contrary (*World of the Child*, 91).

⁸³ The case of the rebellious son (בן סוֹרֵר) in Deut 21:18-21 — where a father and mother can bring their son to trial before the community's elders and have him executed for his rebelliousness, gluttony, and drunkenness — may seem to contradict this conclusion. However, most scholars believe that the son in question is an adult and thus over the age of twenty. See Lothar Ruppert, "סוֹרֵר," *TDOT* 10:355; Elizabeth Bellefontaine, "Deuteronomy 21:18-21: Reviewing the Case of the Rebellious Son," *JSOT* 4 (1979):15; Gerhard von Rad, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary* (trans. Dorothea Barton; OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), 138.

limit to adult manhood at age sixty, after which the man is only valued at fifteen shekels. After age sixty, according to Eng, a man would be considered old and would be described with the term זָקֵן as opposed to terms more associated with adult manhood like אִישׁ, אָדָם, or גִּבּוֹר.⁸⁴

2.1.6 Summary

In sum, the hegemonic masculinity displayed in the HB (i.e., what it means to be a “man’s man”) is defined by certain specific characteristics. First and foremost, the biblical adult male must be physically strong and courageous, a quality that is most frequently and appropriately expressed on the battlefield. The idealized adult male must also have wisdom, evidenced by his persuasive words and prudent deeds. He avoids excessive socialization with women, as this is the trademark of a child. He is further to embody self-control and self-mastery, keeping to a regimented life with strict guidelines for food consumption, sex, and war, among other things. He has ensured his legacy through his fertility, spawning legitimate heirs that will inherit from him. The concern for his heirs’ legitimacy means that he expresses his fertility within the confines of

⁸⁴ Milton Eng, *The Days of our Years: A Lexical Semantic Study of the Life Cycle in Biblical Israel* (Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 464; New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 123. Eng adds that if a man lived beyond seventy, he was considered “extremely old” and would be described with terms like זָקֵן מְאֹד (1 Sam 2:22), or שִׁיבָה טוֹבָה (Gen 15:5).

marriage, preferably an endogamous marriage. Finally, he defends the honor of his kin—whether on the level of his close relatives or on the level of all Israel—and he stands in solidarity with them.⁸⁵

2.2 Boyhood in the Hebrew Bible

The above overview of hegemonic masculinity in the HB can now be complemented by considering biblical boyhood. To this end, the terms used to describe boys and young men in the HB are examined below.

The age range of biblical boyhood roughly spans from birth to age twenty, the age of legal majority (see above).⁸⁶ It therefore encompasses several developmental stages, including what in modern terminology is referred to as infancy, adolescence, puberty, and young adulthood. This diversity of age and development is reflected in the terms used to describe boyhood in the HB. These terms can be separated into two groups: one relating to younger boys (approximately from birth to age twelve) and the

⁸⁵ The hegemonic male ideal is not connected explicitly with a particular age, although it is again worth noting that many biblical legal texts consider age twenty the age of legal majority for a man.

⁸⁶ Although presumably if a young man were to display the characteristics of masculinity before age twenty, including marriage and children, he would be considered a man despite not having reached that age. However, since the HB rarely provides the ages of young male characters—and therefore it is impossible to present solid evidence of a man younger than twenty who is considered an adult man—this must remain speculation.

other to older boys/young men (approximately from age thirteen to twenty). The term נַעַר is noteworthy because it is the only term for boyhood that seems to describe boys in both groups; however, the investigation below shows that the description of the biblical נַעַר more resembles the former group of younger boys and it therefore will be considered together with the terms describing this group.

The discussion below first examines the terms used to describe young boys, in order of their frequency of use.⁸⁷ The analysis shows that the characteristics associated with these terms are very similar. The terms describing older boys/young men are then examined, and their similarities are also noted. The section concludes with a summary of the characteristics associated with the respective groups (i.e., boys and young men) and offers a comparison between them resulting in a more refined definition of male childhood in the HB.

2.2.1 Terms for Young Boys (from Approximately Birth to Age Twelve)

2.2.1.1 נַעַר

Of the wide array of biblical Hebrew terms that connote “youth,” none has been subjected to closer scholarly scrutiny than נַעַר, likely because of its frequency within the

⁸⁷ With the exception of טַף, which is considered at the end of this list despite its comparative frequency. As will be shown, טַף is not as frequently employed as a life-cycle term, and thus is appropriately considered separately.

HB (239 attestations in the masculine form, 61 in the feminine), its appearance on seals discovered by archaeologists in the last century, and because the title of נַעַר is given to individuals in considerably different social locations and of varying age groups.⁸⁸ While many of the significant scholarly treatments of the term in recent decades—two monographs on the term by Hans Peter Stähli⁸⁹ and Carolyn Leeb;⁹⁰ an article by John MacDonald;⁹¹ and a discussion of the term by Lawrence Stager in a larger article on the family in ancient Israel⁹²—argue for different understandings of the term in its social context in ancient Israel, they all tend to elevate newer arguments about the word's

⁸⁸ Persons referred to as נַעַר/נַעֲרָה range in age from the unborn Samson (Judg 13:5-12) to newborn infant Ichabod (1 Sam 4:21), three-month-old Moses (Exod 2:6), newly-weaned-toddler Samuel (1 Sam 1:24), presumably young-adolescent Jether (Judg 8:20-2) and David (1 Sam 16-17), sixteen-year-old Josiah (2 Chr 34:3), seventeen-year-old Joseph (Gen 37:2), of marriageable age (Shechem and Dinah in Gen 34), twenty-eight-year-old Joseph (Gen 41:12) to older adults like Gehazi (2 Kgs 4:12) and Ziba (2 Sam 9:9). They can be found in a servile status (Ziba, Gehazi, Abraham's servant in Gen 18:7), in military roles (as an armor bearer/personal attendant in Judg 7:10, 11; 9:14; 1 Sam 14:1, 6; 2 Sam 1:15; as errand boys for warriors in 1 Sam 20:35; 26:22; as a corps of [possibly elite] troops in 1 Sam 21:3-6; 30:17; 2 Sam 2:14, 21; 1 Kgs 20:14-15), or as participants in priestly and cultic duties (Exod 24:5; Judg 17:7-18:15; 1 Sam 2:11-17). Even a king can refer to himself (1 Kgs 3:7) or be referred to (2 Chr 13:7) as a נַעַר. They are primarily unmarried and childless, but can be married (the Levite's concubine in Jdg 19:3-9) or previously married (Ruth, see Ruth 2:5), and can have children (Ziba in 2 Sam 9:10 and Absalom, who is called a נַעַר throughout 2 Sam 18 but is depicted as having children in 2 Sam 14:27).

⁸⁹ Hans Peter Stähli, *Knabe-Jüngling-Knecht: Untersuchungen zum Begriff נַעַר im Alten Testament* (BBET 7; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1978).

⁹⁰ Carolyn S. Leeb, *Away from the Father's House: The Social Location of na'ar and na'arah in Ancient Israel* (JSOTSup 301; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).

⁹¹ John MacDonald, "The Status and Role of the Na'ar in Israelite Society," *JNES* 35 (1976): 147-70.

⁹² Lawrence E. Stager, "The Archaeology of the Family in Ancient Israel," *BASOR* 260 (1985): 1-35.

nuances at the expense of its obvious connection with the notion of youth.⁹³ Below, after briefly summarizing each of these scholars' conclusions, the case is made for the word's use to signify "youth" or "boy" (in its masculine form) and it will be shown that the term, when used in this context, provides useful data about male childhood in the Bible.

MacDonald's 1976 article "The Status and Role of the Na'ar in Israelite Society" was the first significant modern study of נַעַר. Influenced by the work of Cyrus Gordon⁹⁴ and Anson Rainey⁹⁵ on Ugaritic *n'r*, a term that both believed carried military overtones and was applied to warriors,⁹⁶ MacDonald asserted that the "best known role" of the נַעַר in ancient Israel was that of an "elite military officer."⁹⁷ Of course, this was only the "best known" of the potential occupations for one dubbed a נַעַר in the biblical text, and MacDonald acknowledges that in some instances other non-military meanings are to be

⁹³ Two noteworthy exceptions to this trend are Eng, *Days of Our Years*, and H. F. Fuhs' contribution on the term in *TDOT* ("נַעַר," *TDOT* 9:474-85). Both scholars recognize the multivalence of the term, but recognize its primary connection to the notion of youth (Eng, *Days of our Years*, 59-84; Fuhs, "נַעַר," 9:480-82). Eng (*ibid.*, 63) notes that the association of נַעַר with the definition "servant" reflects a common semantic drift — words denoting youth (such as the French *garçon* and in some contexts the English "boy") often come to be associated with servitude.

⁹⁴ Cyrus H. Gordon, "*n'r*," *UT*: 445 no. 1666.

⁹⁵ Anson F. Rainey, "The Military Personnel of Ugarit," *JNES* 24 (1965): 17-27.

⁹⁶ Although, note that Gordon ("*n'r*," *UT*: 445 no. 1666) also believed that the term was applied to young males.

⁹⁷ MacDonald, "Status," 157.

preferred, especially when the word is used of personal attendants.⁹⁸ In each instance, however, MacDonald believes that the term describes a “young male of high birth.”⁹⁹ He therefore concludes that the English word that best captures the nuances of the Hebrew נַעַר is “squire,” as this term was employed in the medieval era to designate a young man “of good birth” in both a military role and in the role of a personal assistant.¹⁰⁰

Stähli’s 1978 monograph *Knabe-Jüngling-Knecht: Untersuchungen zum Begriff נַעַר im Alten Testament* represents an even more thoroughgoing attempt than MacDonald’s at creating an overarching definition of נַעַר that would adequately explain each of its attestations in the Bible. MacDonald argues that the term alternatively implied either a service or a military context, in contrast to Stähli, who asserts that a greater commonality unites all the instances of the term: all people identified as נַעַר or נַעֲרָה share the characteristic of *dependence* upon someone more socially authoritative than them.¹⁰¹ Having emphasized this foundational commonality, he proceeds to separate the biblical נַעֲרִים/נַעֲרוֹת into two smaller groups: those who are dependent because they are unmarried and thus not yet the heads of their own households; and those who are

⁹⁸ As with Saul’s steward Ziba (2 Sam 9:9), Joshua in his role as the “one ministering” to Moses (מְשָׁרֵת; Exod 33:11), Abraham’s personal נַעַר, who helps him prepare food and drink for his visitors in Gen 18; and Gehazi the attendant of Elisha (2 Kgs 4:12). See *ibid.*, 151-56.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 147.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 170.

¹⁰¹ Stähli, *Knabe*, 99.

grouped together as “servants” — this latter group including slaves, soldiers, or administrators of the king. Most importantly for the current discussion, Stähli moves even further away from the connotations of “youth” typically associated with נַעַר than does MacDonald, arguing that the term had more to do with “(Rechts-) status”¹⁰² than with any determinable “Lebensphase.”¹⁰³

Stager’s article, in contrast to the other studies mentioned here, pays closer attention to the social and familial forces that underlie the term נַעַר. For Stager, the increased demand for land that characterized the period after the establishment of the Israelite monarchy (a demand brought about by the closing of the frontier and increased royal gifts of land to the king’s servants and allies) created a situation where equal division of land among male heirs could no longer provide each with sufficient plots. Primogeniture laws therefore were enforced with greater stringency, and younger males in any landholding family would have found themselves unable to earn a livelihood on inherited land. This group of younger sons searching for occupation, wealth, and adventure, comprised the ranks of the biblical נַעָרִים in Stager’s view. The vocational options open to such נַעָרִים were threefold: becoming a steward for a wealthy or

¹⁰² Ibid., 100.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 77-84.

powerful individual, choosing a military life of knight-errantry, or joining the levitical priesthood.¹⁰⁴ For Stager, this is why most individuals called נְעָרִים in the HB are found in service, military, or cultic/priestly roles.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, while it is the case that many of the נְעָרִים are young, the term נְעָר is not primarily one concerned with describing a phase of the life-cycle, being only “indirectly related to age.”¹⁰⁶

The most thorough English-language treatment of נְעָר in the HB, Carolyn Leeb’s monograph *Away from the Father’s House: The Social Location of na ‘ar and na ‘arah in Ancient Israel*, attempts to articulate an all-encompassing definition of the term that can account for almost every one of its biblical attestations. For Leeb, former treatments of the term that emphasize a commonality of age, marital status (Stähli), or class and occupation (Stager, MacDonald) among individuals termed נְעָרִים/נְעָרוֹת are misguided. Instead, she locates the commonality in their shared social location as individuals located “away from the father’s house,” that is, “beyond the protection and control of their fathers, while not yet master or mistress of their own households.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Stager, “Archaeology,” 25-28. Stager (28) hearkens back to a contention made by Albright in his *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* that the tribe of Levites was composed of male children dedicated by their parents to priestly service to argue that levitical priesthood was non-hereditary and therefore an attractive option for a later-born son of a landholding family.

¹⁰⁵ See above, 97 n. 88, for examples.

¹⁰⁶ Stager, “Archaeology,” 26.

¹⁰⁷ Leeb, *Away from the Father’s House*, 41.

Leeb argues more forcefully for the separation of נַעַר from the connotation of youth than do the other scholars.¹⁰⁸ This is because of the specificity of her definition—which stresses the sociological meaning of the term, with no room for alternatives like those taken from the semantic realm of age/lifecycle—and her claim to its near-complete applicability to every instance of the term in the Bible. The rift she posits between the term and a meaning signifying youthfulness, however, is ultimately based on questionable assumptions and compels her to defend some credulity-straining readings of biblical texts. Since Leeb’s work is the most outspoken in contesting the usefulness of a word study of נַעַר for a discussion of boyhood in the Bible, it must be critiqued further.

In order to support her thesis, Leeb must explain why the LXX translators consistently translate נַעַר, when not used to describe a servant, with Greek terms for youth such as παῖδάριον, which is used 140 times. Furthermore, for the rabbis, נַעַר (and its abstract form נַעֲרוּת) were “precise terms for youth, with the particular connotation of vigor and strength.”¹⁰⁹ Leeb dismisses this seemingly decisive evidence against her argument by claiming that over time, the society that created the institution of נַעַר-

¹⁰⁸ Stager (“Archaeology,” 26), while believing that the term is “only indirectly related to age,” still states that נַעֲרִים are typically “youthful clients” (25). MacDonald’s discussion is premised on the identification of the נַעַר as a “young male of high birth” (“Status,” 147. emphasis mine). Stähli moves farther away from the youthful connotations of the term than the others; however, one of the two groups that he argues are categorized under the term נַעַר are young and unmarried.

¹⁰⁹ Fuhs, “נַעַר,” 9:480. Fuhs cites as evidence *b. Git.* 70a; *Šabb.* 11a; and *Ber. Rab.* 48:19, 22 on Gen 18:11, 13.

ship—one defined by the social centrality of the **בֵּית אָב**—changed so drastically that the original meaning of the term was lost. This resulted in a “semantic drift” over time, whereby a *pars pro toto* mechanism operated to elevate one quite incidental aspect of certain biblical **נְעָרִים**—their youth—to prominence at the cost of its original sociological meaning.¹¹⁰ Moreover, Leeb contends that “no obvious pattern” obtains in the LXX translation of the term; thus conclusions about its meaning should not rely on this evidence.¹¹¹

Leeb’s argument is subject to critique on a number of levels. First, it is unlikely that a social institution as ubiquitous that of the **נְעָרָה/נָעַר**, so prevalent that the term describing it occurs over 200 times in the HB, would be so completely eradicated from the memory of a people that they would understand and translate its meaning incorrectly forever after. This is even more problematic given that over half of the occurrences of the term are found in the Deuteronomistic History,¹¹² which even by the most conservative estimates reached its final form in the sixth century BCE. It is highly unlikely that only three centuries later when the LXX was translated such a significant institution (if Leeb’s thesis is to be believed) would be completely eliminated from

¹¹⁰ Leeb, *Away from the Father’s House*, 21. Leeb (165) even accepts that at certain very rare and late biblical texts, the abstract **נְעָרִים** may connote youth, as in Ps 103:5.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 187.

¹¹² Of the 239 instances of **נָעַר**, 86 are found in 1-2 Samuel, 35 in 1-2 Kings, and 23 in Judges.

society (were post-exilic young people never in the dependent position of being away from their father's house?), utterly forgotten, its name completely misunderstood, and that it would leave no trace in any other similar or derivative institution.

Also, while the LXX may use a variety of words to translate נַעַר, it is not the case that no "obvious pattern" is recognizable, as Leeb argues. As noted above, over half of the instances of the word are translated as παῖδάριον, while the next most frequent Greek words employed are παῖδιον (27 occurrences), νεανίσκος (25), and νέος (19).¹¹³ Certainly a pattern is evident here, namely, that each of these terms signifies youth, a fact that Leeb wishes to ignore. Finally, she claims that an incidental feature of biblical נַעַרִים—their youth—later came to cloud the meaning of the original word, she neglects her own argument that "[b]iblical נַעַרִים are very rarely children" and that given the life expectancy of ancient Israelites, "a majority of [biblical] נַעַרִים were probably middle aged."¹¹⁴ Leeb thus cannot claim that a "*pars pro toto*" mechanism brought about the eventual dominance of the meaning "youth" for נַעַר if she does not believe that the word in earlier sources had a strong connection with youth.

¹¹³ See Fuhs, "נַעַר," 9:485.

¹¹⁴ Leeb, *Away from the Father's House*, 189.

Finally, the critique of Leeb's work offered by Eng and, separately, Gruber, point out the greatest flaw in her methodology. Leeb's attempt to unify every occurrence of נָעַר under one definition "flies in the face of the universal linguistic principle called *polysemy*," which recognizes that almost every lexeme in every language has multiple meanings.¹¹⁵ Gruber, in a highly critical review, compares her premise to the linguistic problems suffered by schizophrenics who are unable to process homonyms and frequently define words by their more common meaning when a less common homonym is appropriate.¹¹⁶ He concludes his review claiming that Leeb's project, which attempts "to find a social matrix that would account for the use of *na'ar* to describe both the infant Moses and Abraham's two servants (Gen 22:5)," is "quashed by common sense."¹¹⁷

This discussion of Leeb's work emphasizes that her study of נָעַר, like the work of any scholar who attempts to articulate an all-inclusive definition of the term, encounters unavoidable difficulties. In short, the multivalence of the term precludes a universal definition. Certainly, the insights of MacDonald, Stähli, Stager, and Leeb have their place: the semantic range of the term is sufficiently broad that there are a number of

¹¹⁵ Eng, *Days of Our Years*, 62.

¹¹⁶ Mayer I. Gruber, review of Carolyn S. Leeb, *Away from the Father's House: The Social Location of na'ar and na'arah in Ancient Israel*, *JQR* 43 (2003): 613.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 615.

instances of נַעֲרִים in military contexts (MacDonald, Stager), disconnected from paternal patronage (Leeb), as personal attendants (Stähli, Stager), in the priesthood (Stager), or unmarried (Stähli). Still, the neglect of the term's connotation of youth—of which each of these scholars is guilty to some degree—is unfortunate, given the many biblical passages in which this meaning is implied.¹¹⁸ Indeed, no discussion of the characterization of the male child in the Bible is complete without a thorough treatment of what the biblical text says about נַעֲרִים. In recognition of the multivalence of the term, however, the discussion below focuses only on instances of the term that can be argued with reasonable certainty to refer to נַעֲרִים with the youthful connotation in mind. Thus, it excludes instances where נַעַר refers to a man's role as a servant or a member of the military.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Note, for example, the frequency with which the word is used in parallel with יָלֵד, which undeniably refers to young boys as discussed below. Examples of characters who are simultaneously named נַעַר and יָלֵד include Ishmael (referred to as a נַעַר in Gen 21:12, 17 (2x), 18, 19, 20; and as a יָלֵד in 21:14), Joseph (called a נַעַר in Gen 37:2; and יָלֵד in 37:30, although this may be due to source discrepancy), Benjamin (called a נַעַר in Gen 43:8; 44:22, 30, 31, 32, 33 (2x), and 34; and called a יָלֵד in Gen 44:20), Moses (a נַעַר in Exod 2:6; a יָלֵד in 2:3, 7, 8, 9, 10), David's ill-fated firstborn son by Bathsheba (a נַעַר in 2 Sam 12:16; a יָלֵד in 12:15), Jeroboam's son (called a נַעַר in 1 Kgs 14:3, 17, and a יָלֵד in 14:12), and the group of boys who taunted the prophet Elijah (called נַעֲרִים in 2 Kgs 2:23 and יָלֵדִים in 2:24).

¹¹⁹ According to Eng's reckoning, of the 239 instances of the term, 120 are "age referential" (*Days of our Years*, 31). Eng's review of the recent literature on the term concludes, in agreement with this study, that the term נַעַר "does describe a *lebensphase* (pace Stähli and others) and in particular that stage of life between infancy and full adulthood, incorporating the modern categories of childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood" (ibid., 81).

2.2.1.1.1 Age range

As with each of the other terms for the young in biblical Hebrew examined below, no *strictly specific* age range is implied when an individual is referred to as a נָעָר.¹²⁰ However, the age range of נָעָר (when used as a life-cycle term) is significantly smaller than many scholars presume, provided one eliminates references to older men like Gehazi and Ziba, who are termed נָעָרִים because of their status as servants. Indeed, some scholars too quickly eliminate age from the semantic field of the term. Leeb, for instance, lists the named characters referred to as נָעָרִים, noting that their age range spans from unborn child (Samson in Judg 13:5, 7, 8, 12) to mature, if not elderly adult (Ziba throughout 2 Samuel). She thus concludes that age cannot be a “determinative criterion” for the word.¹²¹ However, clearly Ziba is termed נָעָר throughout his life because of his servant-status as the chief steward of Saul’s house.

Other instances of the term’s ascription to a mature man, commonly referenced by those who deny the term’s connection with youth, are easily explained. Absalom, who appears to have attained adulthood by the time of his revolt, is famously called a

¹²⁰ See Fuhs, “נָעָר,” 9:480, who rightly notes that “[a]lthough some terms refer to a specific age bracket or stage of development (*yônēq*, *ôlêl*, *yeled*, *‘elem*, *bāḥūr*, *zāqēn*), it is hardly possible to assign definite ages to them and associate them with other corresponding terms...”

¹²¹ Leeb, *Away from the Father’s House*, 13.

נַעַר by David (2 Sam 18:5, 29, 32).¹²² According to Fuhs, this is likely because David wishes to “play down [Absalom’s] revolt and make it out to be a foolish escapade of youth,” and therefore is not a declaration of Absalom’s actual age.¹²³ Similarly, Joseph—who is called a נַעַר עֶבְרִי by Pharaoh’s cupbearer in Gen 41:12—is 30 years old when term is applied to him (Gen 41:46).¹²⁴ The cupbearer, however, is alluding to Joseph’s servile status in the jail where they were both confined. Significantly, the cupbearer further elaborates on precisely this servile status in his next words about Joseph, when he identifies him as a servant (עֶבֶד) of the chief prison guard.¹²⁵

Accounting for the multivalence of נַעַר as a term that includes servants, military men, and priestly functionaries, and for the two cases just mentioned that seem to skew the age-span of the word, one is left with a much narrower age range for the term in reference to youths. As already shown, the case of Samson—referred to as a נַעַר even

¹²² Absalom had three sons and a daughter and thus was presumably married (2 Sam 14:27). Also, his ability to sow the seeds of rebellion, lead an army, and have sex publicly with his father’s concubines indicates his adulthood.

¹²³ Fuhs, “נַעַר,” 9:481.

¹²⁴ Note also that Joseph has been referred to in the text as a man (אִישׁ) by this point (Gen 39:2, 14).

Presumably Joseph has aged sufficiently in the intervening years since he was sold into slavery so that, even though he is not yet married, he is still considered a “man.” Joseph’s coming-of-age, therefore, is not related in the HB narrative.

¹²⁵ Furthermore, as Eng argues (*Days of our Years*, 73 n. 74), “the chronology of the patriarchal and Joseph narratives are notorious for their problems,” therefore it is problematic to determine Joseph’s age in this scene based only on the report of his age as a thirty-year-old in Gen 41:46. Eng also notes that by Gesenius’ reckoning, Joseph is depicted in this scene as “a youth of nearly twenty years old” (ibid.).

before his birth—provides the lowest age on the spectrum. The oldest נַעַר whose age is mentioned is Joseph, who is seventeen (Gen 37:2). While this spectrum provides no rigid borders on its upper limit, and keeping in mind that biblical life-cycle terminology does not seem to be precise, the evidence suggests that individuals referred to with this word were youths in the first two decades of their lives, were unmarried (viz. Stähli), and had not yet had children.¹²⁶

2.2.1.1.2 *Feminine form*

Evidence from the feminine form נַעֲרָה for the most part confirms the conclusions reached above. As with נַעָרִים, female characters called נַעֲרוֹת are either servants/attendants (e.g., Gen 24:61; Exod 2:5; Ruth 2:8) or girls/young women (1 Kgs 1:2-4; Gen 24:14; Esth 2:4). The age range for נַעֲרוֹת, however, is smaller than that of נַעָרִים, since the former term is reserved usually for older girls of marriageable age while the latter includes both very young boys and those of marriageable age.¹²⁷ Moreover, unlike נַעָרִים, occasionally girls referred to as נַעֲרוֹת are married (Judg 19:3-9; Deut 22:13-21; Esth 2:20); however, Fuhs notes that this terminology is only applied to a married woman “when the text addresses her continuing relationship with her former family or her

¹²⁶ For the unmarried status of נַעָרִים when understood as a life-cycle term, see also Victor Hamilton, “נַעַר,” *NIDOTTE* 3:125.

¹²⁷ See Fuhs, “נַעַר,” 9:483.

father.”¹²⁸ Finally, unlike with the masculine form (e.g., 2 Sam 2:12-17), there are understandably no equivalent uses of the feminine form in a military context.

2.2.1.1.3 Characteristics of נָעָרִים

2.2.1.1.3.1 Powerlessness

Turning to the specific characteristics ascribed to individuals referred to as נָעָרִים with respect to their youth reveals that the most frequently attested attribute is a lack of power. Biblical נָעָרִים are those *acted upon*, not the *actors*. Often this impotence is understood as an absence of *physical* strength.¹²⁹ The young Ishmael of Gen 21 (referred to as a נָעָר in v. 12, 17 (twice), 18, 19, 20) is consistently depicted as powerless: he is cast under a bush and left by his mother to die (v. 15), has no energy to do anything to remedy this situation but call out (v. 17), and must be lifted up (v. 18) and given water (v. 19) by his mother.¹³⁰ Joseph (a נָעָר according to Gen 37:2) lacks the strength to put up any resistance to the malicious actions of his brothers. The infant Moses, called a נָעָר in Exod 2:6, is the picture of helplessness when he is set adrift in a basket upon the Nile.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ It should be recognized, however, that while this lack of strength is a frequent feature of the description of נָעָרִים, “youthful energy” is not precluded by this characteristic. See Isa 40:30-31, in which the seemingly inexhaustible energy of a boy is vital to the prophet’s claim about the vitality that Yhwh will impart on those who rely on him—it will be even more inexhaustible than that of a נָעָר. Similarly, Lam 3:27 identifies youth as the proper time for exertion: “It is good for a man to bear a yoke in his youth” (נְעוּרָיו).

¹³⁰ For the issue of Ishmael’s age in Gen 21, see chapter 1, 43 n. 80.

Isaiah's famous utopian imagery of a young boy (נֶעַר קָטָן) leading fierce beasts (wolf, lion, and leopard [11:6]) draws its force from the expectation that under normal circumstances no one, but *especially not a powerless boy*, would be able to accomplish such a feat.

Frequently this physical powerlessness associated with the נֶעַר is discussed in a military context and is connected with a crippling fear to enter battle. Jether's fear to draw his sword in battle (Judg 8:21) is recognized as a lack of strength. Saul's warning to David not to challenge Goliath (1 Sam 17:33) hinges on the claim that a נֶעַר would have no chance to defeat a man of war (אִישׁ מִלְחָמָה), presumably because of the difference in battlefield experience and the ability to exert power. Solomon's claim that he is but a young boy (נֶעַר קָטָן; 1 Kgs 3:7) is further qualified by adding that he does not know "going out and coming in" — language shown by Gregory Mobley to be derived from a military context.¹³¹ Solomon's claim therefore is based on the assumption that a נֶעַר is unfit for the battlefield because of his helplessness and inexperience. Finally, David's assertion that Solomon is but a "tender" (רַךְ) boy in 1 Chr 22:5 and 29:1 can be read in

¹³¹ Gregory Mobley, *The Empty Men: The Heroic Tradition of Ancient Israel* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 2005), 229. See the military contexts of this phrase's use in Num 27:17; Josh 14:11; 1 Sam 18:16; 29:6; 2 Sam 11:1.

light of Deut 20.8, where the same relatively rare adjective is used to describe the hearts of men who are too afraid to go into battle and should be allowed to leave the army.¹³²

Just as often, however, the powerlessness ascribed to a נַעַר is better understood as a lack of socially-legitimated power, or authority.¹³³ As such, נַעַרִים have little to no control over their fate, being culturally obligated to submit to the will of their superiors. In the famous aqedah in Gen 22, Isaac (a נַעַר according to vv. 5 and 12) would seem to possess the physical strength to resist being bound and placed upon an altar by his 100-year-old father (see v. 9, where he is depicted as strong enough to carry wood for the burnt offering up the incline of Moriah); but he does not resist, presumably because of his acquiescence to the will of his authoritative father. Shechem, a נַעַר according to Gen 34:19, is unable to negotiate for the hand of Dinah without the assistance of his father, suggesting his inferior social power. Throughout the Joseph novella, the נַעַר Benjamin (see e.g., Gen 43:8; 44:22) is a pawn in the hands of his social superiors, that is, his father and older brothers. Joseph demands that his brothers bring Benjamin to Egypt (Gen 42:34), Jacob attempts to keep him beside him (42:36-38), and Judah negotiates with

¹³² Note also the Roman application of the adjective *mollis* "soft" and *tener* "tender" to male children, usually to distinguish them from male adults. See Jonathan Walters, "'No More than a Boy': The Shifting Construction of Masculinity from Ancient Greece to the Middle Ages," *Gender and History* 5 (1993): 29.

¹³³ For the distinction between authority and power, see Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo, "Woman, Gender, and Society: A Theoretical Overview," in Rosaldo and Lamphere, *Woman, Culture, and Society*, 17-45.

Jacob to allow the brothers to take Benjamin back with them (43:8-10). In all of these maneuvers Benjamin is given no say with regard to his fate and is beholden to the will of those more authoritative than he. The נְעָרִים Ephraim and Manasseh (Gen 48:16) similarly have no voice in the blessing scene at Jacob's bedside but must accept the seemingly random decision of the patriarch to assign a greater blessing to the younger of the two. Their silence is telling compared to the strong objections of their authoritative father Joseph on this matter (48:17-18). Finally, the fear of the social (and possibly) physical power of his master Eli causes the נְעָר Samuel (1 Sam 3:1, 8) to refrain initially from telling him about God's revelation to him of the judgment against Eli's house (3:15).

2.2.1.1.3.2 *Lack of wisdom and predilection for rash and violent action*

Another common trait ascribed to נְעָרִים in the Bible, especially prominent in wisdom literature, is that they lack wisdom, which comes only with age (cf. Prov 14:24; 16:31). Thus Prov 22:15 states that folly (אֵוֶלֶת) is bound up in the heart of a נְעָר and is only removed by the rod of discipline. Similarly, Prov 7:7 pairs a נְעָר in with the "simple" (פְּתָאִים) and describes him as lacking in "heart," here better rendered as

“understanding.”¹³⁴ However, despite the emphasis on this lack of wisdom, children in wisdom literature are, in the words of William Brown, “primarily educable.”¹³⁵ Indeed, the purpose of the collection of Proverbs, according to its prologue (1:4), is to impart knowledge (דַּעַת) and purpose/discretion (מְזִמָּה) to נְעָרִים. It is this characteristic of biblical children that Jeremiah refers to in his response to the divine call to prophecy: his objection to the call is that, as a נְעָר, he does not know how to speak (Jer 1:6). This is not a confession of an inability to articulate clearly, as in Moses’ call narrative, but rather indicates a lack of assurance on the thoughts behind the words, an acknowledgement of a lack of wisdom.¹³⁶

Related to the biblical characterization of children as lacking in wisdom is the recognition that they are prone to rash and occasionally violent actions. Shechem’s sexual violence against Dinah, in addition to his hasty decision to reveal to Jacob his willingness to pay any price for Dinah’s hand (Gen 34:11-12)—a poor negotiating tactic

¹³⁴ See Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (trans. Margaret Kohl; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 40-53. Wolff argues that in the HB the heart (לֵב) performs cognitive functions rather than strictly emotional ones.

¹³⁵ William P. Brown, “To Discipline without Destruction: The Multifaceted Profile of the Child in Proverbs,” in *The Child in the Bible* (ed. Marcia J. Bunge; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2008), 69.

¹³⁶ It is irrelevant here whether or not Jeremiah is actually of the age where he could be considered a נְעָר.

Regardless of his age, his objection has no meaning unless the inability to speak effectively were not a known characteristic of נְעָרִים. In fact, since Jeremiah is already considered both a priest (Jer 1:1) and a prophet (1:5) and his call narrative in Jer 1 is not also concerned with detailing his maturation, it is likely that Jeremiah’s claim that he is a נְעָר is a rhetorical device.

if ever there was one! — displays this violence and impetuosity associated with a youth's lack of wisdom. The tale of Elisha's taunting by the boys of Bethel in 2 Kgs 2:23-24 provides more evidence of the tendency of the young towards unwise actions that can end in violence, as they do here when the disrespected and angered prophet curses the boys and a bear emerges from the forest to maul forty-two of them. David's frequent reference to Absalom as a נָעָר also relies upon the cultural assumption that "youthful indiscretions" are common and should not be punished as severely as those of an adult. Thus Absalom—even though a mature man by this point in the text— is still a boy in his father's eyes and thus not deserving of death because, to use a modern idiom, "boys will be boys." Finally, although it is not clear whether the נָעָרִים mentioned as working in Boaz's fields in Ruth 2 are servants or young boys,¹³⁷ Boaz's promise to Ruth in 2:9 that he has commanded the נָעָרִים not to touch her suggests that there was a very real danger that they could possibly harm her. Indeed, Carasik argues that Ruth was a victim of "sexual harassment" by these נָעָרִים when trying to fetch water for herself from the

¹³⁷ Note that Edward F. Campbell, Jr. (*Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary* [AB 7; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975], 85-86) translates נָעָר in Ruth 2:6 as "young man," and נָעָרִים in 2:9 as "young people," adding that the repetition of the term in both its masculine and feminine forms throughout the chapter adds a noteworthy "emphasis on youth" to this particular section of the text (*ibid.*, 93). Tod Linafelt (*Ruth* [Berit Olam; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1999], 31, 34-35) argues that the youth of the field hands should be emphasized in translation because of its connection with the theme of sexual tension and power-plays in Ruth 2—particularly, Boaz's interest in ensuring his possession of Ruth over against the young men who are potential suitors.

vessels near them.¹³⁸ Thus, the biblical portrait of young men/boys, as in the literature of other ancient societies,¹³⁹ is colored by their tendency towards impetuous and often violent behavior likely resulting from a lack of the foresight for the consequences of their actions.

2.2.1.1.3.3 *Beauty*

A less prominent, but recognizable facet of the biblical portrayal of youths identified by the term נָעָר is that they are held up as an aesthetic ideal for the male body. The admiration of the beauty of the young male is particularly focused on the freshness of their complexion and their lack of the scars, worn lines, and toughness that come with advancing years. Thus in the story of Naaman's healing by Elisha in 2 Kgs 5, the drastic change in the leper's skin after his bathing in the Jordan is emphasized by comparing it to the aesthetic ideal: the skin of a young boy (v. 14). This idealization of youthful

¹³⁸ Michael Carasik, "Ruth 2,7: Why the Overseer was Embarrassed," *ZAW* 107 (1995): 493-94.

¹³⁹ Among those who commented on the rash behavior of young males in the ancient world were Plato and Aristotle. Plato's Athenian argues that "Now of all wild young things a boy is the most difficult to handle. Just because he more than any other has a fount of intelligence in him which has not yet 'run clear,' he is the craftiest, most mischievous, and unruliest of brutes." (Plato, *Laws* (trans. A. E. Taylor) in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato* (ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), bk. 7, 808d, 1379). Aristotle writes in his *Nicomachean Ethics* that the child lives "at the beck and call of his appetite" (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (trans. W. D. Ross) in *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (ed. Jonathan Barnes; 2 vols.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), bk. 4, 1119b6, 2:1767.), adding in his *Politics* that he is "imperfect" and his "excellence" is "not relative to himself alone, but to the perfect man and his teacher," and compares the two like a slave and a master. (Aristotle, *Politics* (trans. B. Jowett) in Barnes, ed., bk. 2, 1260a31-33, 2:2000). These quotes were brought to my attention through Eric Ziolkowski, "Bad Boys of Bethel: Origin and Development of a Sacrilegious Type," *HR* 30 (1991): 340-41.

complexion is similarly found in Job 33:25, where those whom God has chosen to deliver are given skin fresher than that of a youth (רִטְפֹּשׁ בְּשׁוֹר מְנַעַר) as a sign of God's favor.

Furthermore, two of the three male characters¹⁴⁰ referred to in the Bible as beautiful, both with the phrase יָפֶה מְרֹאָה ("beautiful of sight;" i.e., "beautiful to behold"), are explicitly identified as נָעָרִים: Joseph (Gen 39:6) and David (1 Sam 17:42; see also 1 Sam 16:12 where he is said to have beautiful eyes and a good appearance).¹⁴¹

In the case of David, the text also states that a significant aspect of his beauty is that he is אֶדְמוֹנִי (1 Sam 16:12; 17:42), an adjective NRSV translates in these two cases as "ruddy." The only other use of this term is applied to Esau; significantly it is only applied to him as a *newborn child* (Gen 25:25). Certainly Esau's hairiness at his birth is not characteristic of a newborn, but the fact that this term is associated with him at his birth, alongside the evidence from 1 Samuel that being "ruddy" was perceived as beautiful and that the skin of the young was the gold standard for the complexion, it is likely that this ruddiness is so attractive because it is characteristic of youth—a

¹⁴⁰ That is, named characters. There is a passing reference to the beauty of an unnamed king in Ps 45:2 [MT 45:3].

¹⁴¹ Absalom is the only other named male character referred to as beautiful, but he is specifically called a beautiful *man* (אִישׁ-יָפֶה) in 2 Sam 14:25. However, when describing his beauty, his lack of blemish (מוֹם) is emphasized, a characteristic of the young boys taken to Nebuchadnezzar's court in Dan 1:4. Furthermore, as argued above, the text's reference to Absalom's beauty may in fact be an attempt at reducing his rebellion to a youthful indiscretion, as David does by referring to him as a נָעָר throughout 2 Sam 18.

relationship that is also attested in the common practice in modern English of attributing a “rosy complexion” to the young. Thus, as in cultures both ancient and modern, the HB frequently associates beauty with youth.¹⁴²

2.2.1.1.4 Summary

Summarizing the evidence of this study of נַעַר reveals features of the conception of male youth in the HB. When נַעַר is used in the context of the life-cycle the term’s age range is from before birth to around twenty years old (the oldest named נַעַר being seventeen). Boys and young men who are called נַעַר are unmarried and childless. The most commonly noted attribute of the נַעַר is his powerlessness, lacking both physical strength (though not necessarily physical *energy*) and social authority. Young males are also characterized by their lack of wisdom, a trait that can be remedied through discipline and education. This lack of wisdom and disregard for the consequences of one’s actions often result in rash and occasionally violent actions against others, often those with even less power and authority like young women. Finally, the נַעַר, especially his youthful complexion, is idealized as a paragon of physical male beauty in the HB.

¹⁴² For a discussion of the aesthetic appreciation of young boys in the classical world, see Walters, “No More than a Boy,” 28-31.

2.2.1.2 ילד

Another common term for young boyhood in the HB is ילד, with eighty-nine occurrences. Analyzing the nuances of this term and naming the characteristics common to ילדים adds further detail to the discussion of biblical boyhood.

2.2.1.2.1 Age range

The first issue to discuss is the age range of biblical ילדים. Determining this presents many of the same difficulties as in the analysis of נער. Again, a wide spectrum of ages at first glance seems to be encompassed by the term. Individuals called ילדים include an unborn child (of indeterminate sex) in Exod 21:22; male infants in Exod 1:17-18 and 2:3, 2 Sam 12:15, and 1 Kgs 3:25; a newly weaned toddler in Gen 21:8; older boys capable of going to work with their father (2 Kgs 4:18, but note that the boy in that verse is still small enough to be lifted by his mother in 4:36-37) or congregating independently in groups outside town (2 Kgs 2:24); a seventeen-year-old (Gen 37:30); youths old enough to be trained as administrators and counselors in the Babylonian government (Daniel 1); and even married men (Naomi's deceased sons in Ruth 1:5) or the age-contemporaries of the forty-one-year-old king Rehoboam (2 Kgs 12:8, 10, 14). The frequency with which ילד is used to describe those who are also referred to as נערים

further confuses the matter, suggesting that the two words may be interchangeable—that is, describing boys within the same age range.¹⁴³

Again it is important to emphasize the inexact nature of life-cycle terminology in the HB, and that no specific age range will fit the data exactly. Still, as with נער, the age range of ילד is smaller than an initial examination would suggest. Most significantly, Abraham Malamat has convincingly shown in his study of the ילדים of 1 Kgs 12 that the term is used in that passage as a “literary device” used for rhetorical effect; thus 1 Kgs 12 should not be included in attempts to specify the age range of individuals referred to with this word.¹⁴⁴ Next, the use of the term to describe deceased married men in Ruth 1:5—the only time the word is applied to a person known to be married—is typically explained by commentators as a counterpart to the mention of the word again at the conclusion of the book in 4:16.¹⁴⁵ The literary technique is employed to emphasize the

¹⁴³ See above, 106 n. 118.

¹⁴⁴ Malamat argues that the author used this term in a pejorative sense, dubbing Rehoboam’s young contemporaries mere boys in juxtaposition to the learned elders whose counsel the king should have accepted “in order to emphasize the psychological and biological differentiations between both groups” (Abraham Malamat, “Organs of Statecraft in the Israelite Monarchy,” *BA* 28 [1965]: 45). He further argues that the council of young men was probably referred to by a different name like “king’s sons” or “princelings” (*ibid.*, 59). He also finds a parallel to the “bicameral” assembly of elders and younger men seen in 1 Kgs 12 in *Gilgamesh and Agga*, where the hero similarly rejects the advice of the assembly of elders in favor of assembly of younger military men (see Abraham Malamat, “Kingship and Council in Israel and Sumer: A Parallel,” *JNES* 22 [1963]: 250-51).

¹⁴⁵ See Campbell (*Ruth*, 56), who describes the use of the term here as “a very effective inclusio with 4:16, where Naomi takes a new *yeled* into her bosom.” Kirsten Busch Nielsen (*Ruth* [OTL; trans. Edward

redress at the story's conclusion of the tragedy that befell Naomi at its beginning:

whereas Naomi once lost her two ילָדִים, Ruth's righteous deeds restored to her a ילָד.

Alternatively, the use of ילָד in Ruth 1:5 may be rhetorical, where the audience is invited

to view Naomi's loss from her perspective: she is now left without her husband and her

'boys' (יָלָדֶיהָ).¹⁴⁶ The term's application to the seventeen-year-old Joseph (Gen 37:30) also

is not compelling evidence to include in identifying the term's age range: it is possible

that, as with David's affectionate use of נָעַר to describe Absalom, Reuben's distressed

cry to his brothers ("the ילָד is gone; and I, where can I turn?") may similarly employ a

diminutive term to emphasize his pity for his youngest brother. Alternatively, the verse

identifying Joseph as a ילָד may come from a different tradition than the one that gives

his age as seventeen earlier in Gen 37:2.¹⁴⁷ Thus the three instances where the term is

applied to older men or older boys should not be reckoned as evidence in the attempt to

specify the age range of ילָד, as the text employs the term in these instances for literary

effect—or possibly due to source confusion in the case of Gen 37.

Broadbridge; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997], 44) concurs, believing that this "unusual" usage of the term only makes sense when considered in light of 4:16.

¹⁴⁶ An observation made by Ellen Davis (personal communication, July 2013).

¹⁴⁷ See Claus Westermann, *Genesis 37-50* (first Fortress Press ed.; trans. John J. Scullion; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 42. He identifies two variant sources at work in the chapter, one with Reuben as the hero empathetic to the suffering of his youngest brother, and the other casting Judah in this more positive light.

Having narrowed the age range somewhat by removing these three “outliers,” it is important to examine the relationship between נַעַר and יָלֵד and to reject the notion that they are exact synonyms. Looking more closely at the six instances where יָלֵד is used in parallel with נַעַר (other than that in Gen 37), it is clear that half of the boys named are very young or infants (Moses in Exod 2, Ishmael in Gen 21, and David and Bathsheba’s baby in 2 Sam 12), while the other half are of indeterminate age but seem quite young. For example, the taunting boys of Bethel in 2 Kgs 2:23 are specifically referred to as נַעֲרִים קְטָנִים or “young boys.” The ages of Jeroboam’s son (2 Kgs 14) and of Benjamin (Gen 43-44) are more difficult to identify; but their actions do not suggest the vigor and growing independence that comes with later adolescence. It appears, then, that יָלֵד is primarily used in parallel with נַעַר in instances where the boy referred to with both terms is quite young. Thus, despite the apparent broad spread of ages denoted by יָלֵד, upon closer inspection the range narrows significantly, encompassing instead infancy to pre-pubescent childhood, roughly birth-twelve years old.¹⁴⁸ The analysis of the characteristics ascribed to יָלֵדִים strengthens this assertion.

¹⁴⁸ Note that Milton Eng’s analysis of the term’s usage similarly concludes that the best English term to translate the Hebrew יָלֵד is “very young child” or “infant” (Eng, *Days of our Years*, 84).

2.2.1.2.2 Characteristics of ילדים

2.2.1.2.2.1 Powerlessness

As with נערים, the primary characteristic associated with ילדים is their weakness and vulnerability to those who are more socially and physically powerful. This has already been shown with Ishmael, Moses, Joseph, and Benjamin, each of whom are simultaneously referred to as ילד and נער (see p. 106 n. 118). As with נער, the adjective רך (“tender”) is used to describe this characteristic of ילדים in Gen 33:13, where Jacob asks Esau if he can move his family at slower pace than Esau’s group of men because of his children’s “tenderness.” While both terms have the nuance of weakness, ילדים more frequently than נערים are depicted as gravely endangered in some way, likely because of their younger age. For example, the Hebrew ילדים of Exod 1 are in danger of being slaughtered on the order of Pharaoh; the ילד of 1 Kgs 3:25 comes close to being cleaved in two; the widow of Zarephath’s young son dies (1 Kgs 17:17), although he is later resurrected by Elijah. Moreover, ילדים can be seized and enslaved by creditors to pay back their parents’ loans (2 Kgs 4:1), can suffer fatal injuries during routine daily activities (2 Kgs 4:18-19), may be offered in sacrifice to idols (Isa 57:5), traded for prostitutes (Joel 3:3), or, horrifically, may be eaten by their mothers during times of

starvation (Lam 4:10). In all these situations, יְלָדִים are depicted as helpless to defend themselves.

2.2.1.2.2.2 *Impetuosity and lack of wisdom*

The portrayal of יְלָדִים is similar to that of נְעָרִים with regard to another feature: the actions of יְלָדִים are often depicted as impetuous and unwise. The case of the youths taunting the prophet Elisha outside of Bethel (2 Kgs 2:23-24), which has already been mentioned, exemplifies this characteristic: the disrespectful and violent actions of the boys emphasize their ignorance and they receive a disproportionate and violent comeuppance (being assaulted by a mother bear). The example of Rehoboam's folly at accepting the advice of the יְלָדִים with whom he grew up (1 Kgs 12) displays this characteristic as well. Whereas the king's council of elders advise him to answer the discontented and overburdened assembly of Israel with conciliatory language (v. 7), the brash יְלָדִים suggest a harsh and vulgar response (vv. 10-11) that Rehoboam ultimately opts for, resulting in the dissolution of the united kingdom. I have already shown that these יְלָדִים should not be taken literally as young children, given that they are said to have grown up with the 41-year-old Rehoboam (1 Kgs 12:8; cf. 14:21). Recalling Malamat's argument that the term is applied to this group pejoratively to stress their "hot-headed" nature and "political short-sightedness," it bears emphasizing that the

pejorative use of this term relies on the audience's understanding that ילדים are by nature prone to foolish and potentially destructive behavior.¹⁴⁹

2.2.1.2.2.3 *Positive features of ילדים*

Still, the depiction of ילדים in the HB is not only pitiful (focusing on their weakness and vulnerability) and negative (drawing attention to their foolish, impetuous actions). Indeed, the intense emotional connection between a youthful boy and his doting parent is displayed in Jer 31:20: "Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he the child I delight in (ילד שֶׁשָּׂעִים)? As often as I speak against him, I still remember him. Therefore I am deeply moved for him; I will surely have mercy on him, says the Lord." Zechariah's vision of the new Zion anticipates streets filled with youths at play (8:5), demonstrating that the image of children at play is as associated with idyllic imagery in ancient Israel as it is today. Qohelet (11:9-10) stresses that youth (here defined by the abstract noun ילדות) should be a time of rejoicing (שִׂמְחָה), and that worry and vexation (כָּעַס) should be far from the heart during this time. He also emphasizes youth as a time of great potentiality, declaring in Qoh 4:13-14 that it is better to be a poor but wise ילד than a wise and foolish king, because the fortunes of the youth can change radically for the better.

¹⁴⁹ Malamet, "Kingship and Council," 249.

2.2.1.2.3 Feminine form

There are three occurrences of the feminine form יְלִידָה. Of these, two are found in parallel with the masculine form, and therefore do not contribute new data on the characteristics of יְלִידִים beyond that already considered: Zechariah's vision of the new Zion (8:5) depicts both יְלִידִים and יְלִדוֹת playing in the streets; Joel's description of the endangered and powerless יֶלֶד sold for a prostitute (4:3) is paralleled with a similar יְלִידָה who is traded for wine.

Special mention should be given to the third occurrence, where יְלִידָה describes Dinah in Gen 34. This is the only instance of a female character who is simultaneously dubbed a יְלִידָה and a נַעֲרָה. Both the narrator (34:3) and Shechem (34:11) refer to Dinah as a נַעֲרָה, however Shechem also calls her a יְלִידָה in 34:4. Still, this does not equate these terms. Alter notes that Shechem uses the term יְלִידָה when speaking to his father to convince him to negotiate with Jacob for Dinah's hand, and is likely using a diminutive to express tender affection. When the actual negotiations are proceeding, Shechem uses the more appropriate נַעֲרָה, as this term is more often used of older girls of marriageable age like Dinah.¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), xxxv.

2.2.1.2.4 Summary

The data from this discussion of the term יָלֵד provides further information about male youth in the HB. Many of the characteristics of the נַעַר also pertain to the יָלֵד, thereby adding emphasis to their significance in the biblical view of boyhood. Most important is the repeated depiction of the יָלֵד as weak, helpless and vulnerable—indeed even more emphasis is put on the endangered nature of יָלֵדִים than נַעַרִים, likely because the former are generally younger than the latter. Additionally, the actions of boys referred to by both terms are typically shown to be rash and resulting in unintended and tragic consequences. However, alongside these negative or pitiful characteristics, יָלֵדִים are also described positively as full of potential and carefree. Moreover, the affection of a parent for the יָלֵד is emphasized.

2.2.1.3 עוּל

Four distinct nouns are derived from the root עוּל and are considered together here: עוּל, עוּלִי, עוּלָּל, and עוּל(וּ)ל.¹⁵¹ Determining the age range reflected by these nouns becomes apparent by noting the meaning of the root עוּל, which means “to suckle.” The

¹⁵¹ In the past, the last two terms were thought to have derived from a separate root עָלַל, meaning either “to be active” (so Franz Zorrel, *Lexicon hebraicum et aramaicum Veteris Testamenti* [Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1958], 579a) or having an unknown meaning (so BDB, “עָלַל II,” 760). A recent consensus sees those two terms as *qatil* constructions of the root עוּל; see Magne Sæbø, “עוּל,” *TDOT* 10:518-22.

participial form of the verb is found frequently in the HB to refer to animals who are not yet weaned from their mothers: calves in 1 Sam 6:7, 10; lambs in Isa 40:11 and Ps 78:71; and a mixed group in Gen 33:13. Evidence from cognate Semitic languages supports the connection of this root to suckling: the Ugaritic *ʿl* denotes a suckling animal, and the Arabic *ǧwl* means “suckling” and the related *ʿwl* connotes “nurturing.”¹⁵² The use in Lam 2:11; 4:4; Joel 2:16; and Ps 8:2 of nouns derived from this root in parallel with the term יוֹנֵק — which denotes young children who have not yet been weaned (see below) — provides another important clue to the age range of עוֹל.¹⁵³

In all, it is apparent that the words refer to very young children that have not yet been weaned. However, because the age of weaning in ancient Israel is not certain (although three years old has been suggested),¹⁵⁴ it is impossible to give a specific age range for these terms. Still, it is important to note that actions attributed to certain children referred to by a derivative of עוֹל, such as skipping about (Job 21:11), or being

¹⁵² See William R. Dromeris, “עוֹל,” *NIDOTTE* 3:344.

¹⁵³ Although note that the terms derived from עוֹל are sometimes put into relationship with יוֹנֵק through the use of merism, as in 1 Sam 15:3; 22:19; and Jer 44:7. This would suggest that they are not interchangeable terms but rather have a difference of nuance, however slight. Sæbø refers to them as “closely related but different” terms (“עוֹל,” 10:520).

¹⁵⁴ Wolff (*Anthropology*, 121) cites 2 Macc 7:27 in support of this estimate, as does Eng (*Days of our Years*, 53). Wolff (*Anthropology*, 243 n. 9) also refers to the Egyptian *Instruction of Ani*: “Her breast was in thy mouth for three years.” See also 2 Chr 31:16.

present on the streets (Jer 6:11; 9:20; Lam 2:11) suggest that toddlers (to use the modern terminology), not just infants, can be included in the age range they reflect.

It is also important to note that, unlike with נָעַר and יָלֵד, the terms derived from עוֹל do not specifically indicate gender. In other words, it is unclear whether the child referred to by these words is actually a young boy or a girl. Children of this age are essentially “pre-gender,” being too young to be distinguished as boys or girls (cf. נָעַר and יָלֵד, both of which have masculine and feminine forms).¹⁵⁵

2.2.1.3.1 Characteristics

2.2.1.3.1.1 Powerlessness

The characteristic most ascribed to children referred to by these terms, like the pattern shown for other terms describing children, is their vulnerability and weakness. They are often depicted as endangered by or the victims of violence. Sæbø, recognizing the frequency with which this vulnerability is displayed, notes that the nouns עוֹל(ו)ל and עוֹלָל “occur overwhelmingly in portrayals of war and profound distress.”¹⁵⁶ It is no

¹⁵⁵ Julia M. Asher-Greve (“Decisive Sex, Essential Gender,” in *Sex and Gender in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the 47th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Helsinki, July 2-6, 2001* [ed. S. Parpola and Robert M. Whiting; 2 vols.; Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2002], 1:15) shows that this was also the Sumerian conception of very young children: prior to their weaning at around age three both boys and girls are collectively referred to as *lú-tur* or “small people,” only later being called boys (*dumu-nita*) and girls (*dumu-munus*).

¹⁵⁶ Sæbø, “עוֹל,” 10:521.

surprise, then, that the terms are frequently employed in that bleakest of biblical dirges, the book of Lamentations. Here children referred to with these nouns are depicted fainting from hunger in the streets (2:11, 19), begging for food (4:4), and being eaten by their starving mothers (2:20). The horrific image of עֹלָלִים being dashed against stones or walls is employed so frequently (2 Kgs 8:12; Isa 13:16; Hos 13:16 [MT 14:1]; Nahum 3:10; Ps 137:9) that it is practically the standard death description for young children in wartime. The precariousness of the life of a young child is highlighted in Isa 65:20, where it is prophesized that in the new heavens and new earth there will be no more of the all-too-common phenomenon of infant death.¹⁵⁷ Furthermore, such children are powerless to resist being taken as pledge for a loan in Job 24:9.¹⁵⁸ Finally, the psalmist lauds Yhwh in Ps 8:2 (MT 8:3) for establishing strength from the mouths of עֹלָלִים and יוֹנָקִים, a feat that is worthy of praise only because under normal circumstances such children would never be associated with strength.

¹⁵⁷ Trito-Isaiah writes that there will be no more עֹלֵי יָמִים, or “infant of days,” i.e., child who lives to see only a few days.

¹⁵⁸ Reading with the LXX, suggesting the vocalization עֹל as opposed to the MT עַל. Given the parallel term “orphan” in the first verset, this is the preferable vocalization. See Marvin H. Pope, *Job: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 15; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965), 174-75; see also Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 345.

2.2.1.3.1.2 Innocence/Joy

While tragic images stressing the vulnerability and endangered state of children dominate these terms, positive imagery is sometimes present. The עוֹלִים in Job 21:11 are compared to carefree sheep, and the parallel in the second half of the verse has them gamboling about (רָקַד).¹⁵⁹ Job also expresses dismay that even (גַּם) the young עוֹלִים reject and despise him (19:18), a forceful complaint because young children typically do not do such a thing, but rather are normally trusting, affectionate, and accepting.

2.2.1.3.1.3 Association with women

The last important characteristic of the nouns derived from עוֹל is that in many instances the children are associated with women. The intimate natural bond between mother and infant is displayed in Isa 49:15, where Yhwh declares that his loyalty to Zion is even greater than this strongest of human bonds. The association in the biblical text of women and children is often based on their similarities as the disenfranchised and powerless of society: in Mic 2:9, women and their children (עַלְלִיָּהּ) are grouped together as the innocent and powerless victims of the evildoers of Israel and Judah. Similarly, Isa 3:12 complains that the leaders of Judah are but women and children that mislead the

¹⁵⁹ This second verset employs the term יָלַד, but given the Hebrew poetic principle of synonymous parallelism, what is said of the יָלָדִים in this verset may be applied to the parallel term עוֹלִים in the first verset.

people—a lament that resonates in the audience’s collective ear only if it is assumed that these two groups are alike in their inappropriateness as leaders.

2.2.1.3.2 Summary

The infants and toddlers referred to by the four terms deriving from the root עול, then, are consistently characterized as powerless and fragile, like so many other young children described in the HB with different terms. These nouns in particular are frequently employed in graphic and tragic depictions of the horrors of war, where children’s weakness and the precariousness of their life make them especially prone to danger. The picture is not completely bleak, however. The HB also depicts children called by these terms as playfully running about, and as fundamentally loving and trusting. Finally, these terms show the connection between women and children that arises from the natural bond between mother and child and their shared lack of social authority.

2.2.1.4 יונק

As with the words derived from עול, the term יונק is a participle from a root that carries the meaning of “to suck, nurse” (ינק) and denotes young children (both male and female) who have not yet been weaned. Indeed, of the eleven instances of the term, seven (1 Sam 15:3; 22:19; Jer 44:7; Joel 2:16; Ps 8:2; Lam 2:11; 4:4) use it in conjunction

with a noun derived from עול, leading Domeris to state that there is no difference between the terms¹⁶⁰ and Ringgren to call them “near synonyms.”¹⁶¹

As a result, many of the characteristics of children called by nouns derived from עול are also applicable to יונקים. Thus יונק, like עול, is a term with no gender distinction, and therefore describes “pre-gender” youths. Furthermore, יונקים are depicted as vulnerable, endangered, and helpless: in 1 Sam 15:3; 22:19 they are in danger of being killed in military action; Lam 2:11 has them swooning in the streets because of hunger and weakness; Lam 4:4 shows them begging for food; Ps 8:2 (MT 8:3), noted above, uses the weakness of children to portray the strength of Yhwh; and Num 11:12 has them too young to walk on their own. Similarly, positive imagery emphasizing the playfulness of youth is found: Isa 11:8 depicts a utopian future in which the יונק will be able to play happily and fearlessly (שָׁעֲשַׁע; cf. Jer 31:20) over a snake pit. Finally, while there are no explicit instances where women and יונקים appear together (as was the case with the words derived from עול), simply by describing them as “those who suckle”, or “those who suckle breasts” (יֹנְקֵי שָׁדַיִם; Joel 2:16), a maternal presence is implied. In short, the

¹⁶⁰ William R. Domeris, “יונק,” *NIDOTTE* 2:473.

¹⁶¹ Helmer Ringgren, “יונק,” *TDOT* 6:107. Presumably Ringgren’s reluctance to equate the terms completely stems from the use of the terms in merism constructions that would seem to imply their difference; see above, 128 n. 152.

characteristics of יוֹנְקִים overlap exactly with nursing children referred to with words derived from עוֹל; and for our purposes they can be considered as synonymous.

2.2.1.5 גְּמוּל

Brief mention should be made of the term גְּמוּל, a rare passive participle (used only three times) of the commonly attested root גמל, which means, among other things, "to wean." The term thus technically means "a weaned child," which would probably put the child's age at approximately three, as suggested above (p. 128). Like the other terms for very young children, גְּמוּל is not a gender-specific term, and therefore can describe both young boys and girls. The term is used in parallel with יוֹנְק in Isa 11:8, reflecting the close relationship between the two words: "The nursing child (יוֹנְק) shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child (גְּמוּל) shall put its hand on the adder's den." The common perception of a child as helpless and vulnerable makes the prophet's imagery more striking. The normal reaction to a child playing or standing near a dangerous snake pit on the part of an adult would be alarm, given the child's inability to assess danger and its limited capacity to escape. This anxious response is overturned in the prophet's idyllic vision.

In addition to the characterization of newly weaned children as helpless and vulnerable, the גְּמוּל is also closely associated with its mother, as are the other terms for

infants. This association is found in Ps 131:2, the only other verse to employ the term:

“But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; my soul is like the weaned child that is with me.”¹⁶² The special bond between mother and child is evident here, with the exemplification of calm and peace being found in the image of a child with its mother.

2.2.1.6 טַף

With forty-two occurrences in the biblical text, the term טַף (a collective noun always in the singular) appears at first glance to be a significant part of the biblical vocabulary of childhood. Upon closer examination, however, it becomes evident that, like נָעַר, this word’s semantic range is not confined to describing childhood, and thus the amount of data that an analysis of the term can add to this discussion is diminished. Older studies of the term restrict טַף to its lifecycle definition, glossing it as “children, little ones,” and claiming that it derived from the hapax root טַפַּח found in Isa 3:16,

¹⁶² This verse, however, poses many difficulties for the interpreter, and it is possible that the meaning of the word derived from נָמַל in this verse may be related to the more common use of the verb, “to recompense,” rather than to anything related to weaning. De Boer’s translation of the verse reads “But on the contrary, I have made myself without resistance or movement, just as one does with his mother, thus have I made myself content.” See Pieter A. H. de Boer, “Psalm 131:2,” *VT* 16 (1966): 292.

describing the “mincing” steps of jewelry-laden feet.¹⁶³ In this view, the term originally denoted the uncertain, stumbling gait of a very young child.¹⁶⁴

In modern studies this consensus has crumbled. Locher’s *TDOT* entry on the term represents the current opinion that translating the term consistently with this earlier limited meaning “does not do justice to the 42 occurrences of *tap*.”¹⁶⁵ To begin with, Lee notes that over one-fourth of the instances of *תַּב* are translated in the LXX with *ἀποσκευή*, a term which originally meant “movable property” or “baggage” but came to include the people brought along in military baggage trains with the army’s material resources, specifically the soldiers’ women and children.¹⁶⁶ Indeed, *ἀποσκευή* is used in the LXX itself with this understanding, as in Gen 15:14 and 2 Chr 20:25, where it translates *רְכוּשׁ* (“property, resources”). Lee thus shows, at least for the cases where *ἀποσκευή* translates *תַּב*, that a more appropriate translation would be “dependents.” Locher, although without closely considering the LXX evidence, independently concurs, suggesting that “the basic meaning is probably something like “hangers-on,” i.e., those

¹⁶³ So BDB (“*תַּב*,” 382); see also the support for this limited understanding of the term in Wolff, *Anthropology*, 120, and Gesenius, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, Including the Biblical Chaldee: From the Latin of William Gesenius* (trans. Edward Robinson; Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1854), s.v. *תַּב*.

¹⁶⁴ Gesenius, *ibid*.

¹⁶⁵ C. Locher, “*תַּב*,” *TDOT* 5:347.

¹⁶⁶ John A. L. Lee, “*ΑΠΟΣΚΕΥΗ* in the Septuagint,” *JTS* 23 (1972):430-37.

who are “dependent,” the “remainder...”¹⁶⁷ This collective group would certainly include children and also women (Num 32:16-17) and at times the elderly (Exod 10:9-10). This realization has found its way into many modern English Bible translations, which choose to translate *הַט* with “dependents” instead of “children.”¹⁶⁸

It is debatable, then, given the broader meaning of *הַט* as a household’s *dependents*, whether it is relevant to this examination of childhood in the HB. Eng’s recent review of the literature on *הַט* concludes that the term is not relevant for this discussion. He states that “*הַט* would appear to have the sense of ‘the members of a family (often nomadic) as dependents of a male head of household, often women and children but without specificity as to age or sex’” and thus that the term “is *not* a term belonging to the language of the life cycle.”¹⁶⁹ As with those scholars who would eliminate *נַעַר* from consideration with regard to biblical childhood, Eng goes too far in this blanket disassociation of the term from the life cycle. Better is the recognition by O’Connor and Lee that the term has a “superordinate” meaning (“dependents”) as well

¹⁶⁷ Locher, “*הַט*,” 5:348.

¹⁶⁸ NEB and REB do so frequently, with NJPS (e.g., 2 Chr 31:18) and NRSV (e.g., Gen 47:12) doing so more selectively.

¹⁶⁹ Eng, *Days of our Years*, 93.

as a “hyponymous” meaning (“children”),¹⁷⁰ a duality of meaning that Locher also recognizes.¹⁷¹ The LXX can be a helpful guide in recognizing when to consider טף as a term referring solely to children, as it uses Greek terms denoting children to translate it in seventeen instances. This is certainly a significant decrease from the forty-two instances of the word in the HB, but still is a noteworthy body of data for consideration.

2.2.1.6.1 Age range and characteristics

Specifying an age window for the term, a difficult task with biblical Hebrew lifecycle terminology, is made more difficult because of the limited relevant occurrences. Ezekiel 9:6 provides the only useful information in that it distinguishes children called טף from בְּחוּרִים and בְּתוּלוֹת, terms for older youths (see below). Thus טף should be understood as younger children, to be grouped with such terms as יָלֵד, עוֹלָם, יוֹנֵק, and גְּמוּלָה.

A closer look at the characteristics of טף supports grouping them with these terms for younger children because the features associated with these younger children are associated with טף as well: vulnerability/endangerment and association with women. The endangered status of children dubbed טף is best seen in Num 14:3, 31 and Deut 1:39, each of which depict the fear of the Israelites in the wilderness that, should

¹⁷⁰ Michael P. O'Connor and John A. L. Lee, “A Problem in Biblical Lexicography: The Case of Hebrew *tap* and Greek *aposkeuē*,” ZAW 119 (2007): 406.

¹⁷¹ Locher (“טף,” 5:349) claims that context can help the reader determine when children alone are the referent of the term, as in Num 14:31; Dt 1:39; and “possibly” Dt 29:10(11); 31:12; and Josh 8:35.

enemies come upon them and defeat their warriors, their **טָרֵף** would become booty (**בִּזָּה**) for the avaricious plunderers. Association with women is also apparent: of the seventeen occurrences under consideration, seven (Gen 45:19; Num 14:3; Deut 3:19; 29:10; Josh 1:14; 8:35; 2 Chr 31:18) group **טָרֵף** together with **נָשִׁים**.¹⁷² Moreover, Num 14:3 specifically groups them together because they are all in danger of becoming spoils of war.

2.2.2 Terms for Older Boys/Young Men (from Approximately Age Thirteen to Twenty)

2.2.2.1 **בָּחוּר**

With forty-five occurrences, **בָּחוּר** is the third most common term associated with male youth in the HB. While no exact ages are given to young men called **בָּחוּרִים**, determining the age range for such youths is simpler than with other life-cycle terms because of the consistency with which this term is employed in association with certain characteristics. The close relationship of this term with images of youthful vigor, attractiveness, sexuality, military exploits, and a man's physical "prime" — to be outlined below — mark this phase of youth as one clearly advanced beyond those denoted by the terms already considered. Indeed, the **בָּחוּר** would seem to represent the farthest stage of

¹⁷² I do not include instances where these two terms are listed with other terms describing groups within the population, as in the stock phraseology "men, women, and children" meant to signify the entire population; see Deut 2:34; 3:6; 31:12; and Jer 43:6.

male youthful development prior to mature adulthood in the HB. A בָּחוּר is apparently a man in everything but name — with the exception being that the בָּחוּר is always depicted as one without a wife and children; and thus the בָּחוּר lacks a major defining characteristic of biblical manhood. An approximate age range from the mid- to late-teens is therefore appropriate, with the upper border at twenty years old, as this age represents the border of legal manhood in the HB (see above, pp. 93-94).

Scholarly discussion about בָּחוּר has focused primarily on its etymology, particularly whether more than one root underlies each of the term's occurrences. An alternative root is possible for the instances of בָּחוּר in a military context, such as in 1 Kgs 12:21= 2 Chr 11:1 and 2 Sam 6:1.¹⁷³ Yet all scholars recognize the relationship between most of the occurrences of the term and the root בָּחַר, "to choose." The term is a passive participial form of the root, literally meaning "one chosen or selected." This use of the root to describe the "choicest" or "best" from among a group of things (see the related

¹⁷³ L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm ("בָּחַר I," *HALOT* 1:119) argue that בָּחַר is related to the Akkadian *bahūlātu* found in Sargon and Sennacherib's inscriptions. See the arguments against the proposed alternative root made by Horst Seebass, "בָּחַר," *TDOT* 2:73-87 and John H. Walton "בָּחוּר," *NIDOTTE* 1:634-35.

term **מְבָחָר** in, e.g., Gen 23:6; Deut 12:11; Isa 22:7) suggests the high value placed upon this period of life.¹⁷⁴

2.2.2.1.1 Characteristics of **בְּחוּרִים**

2.2.2.1.1.1 Strength and military associations

One of the primary characteristics attributed to **בְּחוּרִים**, in contrast to the other terms for male youths examined thus far, is physical strength.¹⁷⁵ This is nowhere better exemplified than in Prov 20:29a: “The glory of youths [**בְּחוּרִים**] is their strength [**כֹּחַם**].” The frequent depiction of **בְּחוּרִים** in military contexts also suggests this physical strength; otherwise they would be ill-suited for the hardships of the battlefield.¹⁷⁶ The stereotyped description of the death of **בְּחוּרִים** by the sword (2 Kgs 8:12; Jer 11:22; 18:21; Ezek 30:17; Amos 4:10; Lam 2:21; 2 Chr 36:17) also suggests a military context, especially when juxtaposed with the stereotyped wartime death of infants by dashing as in 2 Kgs 8:12.

¹⁷⁴ Walton (“**בְּחוּרִי**,” 1:634) downplays this connection, claiming that “any aspect of ‘choice quality’ is subordinated, if not entirely absent from the connotation in the OT.” However, in my judgment the frequency of association of **בְּחוּרִי** with positive evaluations of attractiveness and strength suggest that Walton’s assessment is wrongheaded.

¹⁷⁵ As noted above (p. 65) the Sumerian term for “young man” (*guruš*) reflects a similar understanding, as it is written with the sign for “strong” (*kala*). See Asher-Greve, “The Essential Body,” 444.

¹⁷⁶ See 1 Sam 26:2; 2 Sam 6:1; 1 Kgs 12:21=2 Chr 11:1; Jer 51:3; 2 Chr 25:5; Ps 78:31.

2.2.2.1.1.2 Positive connotations

The positive evaluation of this virile period of the male life appears in all texts mentioning בָּחוּרִים. Qohelet idealizes this period of youth, encouraging the בָּחוּר in 11:9 to rejoice (שִׂמְחָה) and be good to himself (וַיְטִיבֵךְ לְבָבְךָ) in the period of his youth (בְּחַיֹּתֶיךָ), following the designs of his heart and the desires of his eyes. The sage then contrasts the days of being a בָּחוּר with the “days of trouble” (יְמֵי הָרָעָה) without pleasure that come later on in life (Qoh 12:1). This period of youth is thus to be cherished: a time of levity, desire, and rejoicing.

The positive connotations of this period of youth also appear in the use of טוב (“good”) with בָּחוּר: Samuel cautions the people of the many injustices endemic to monarchy by describing the king’s penchant for taking the “good young men” (בְּחֹרִיכִם) and using them for his own purposes (1 Sam 8:16); and the only named בָּחוּר in the HB,¹⁷⁷ Saul in 1 Sam 9:2, is described as בָּחוּר וְטוֹב (“a young man and good”).¹⁷⁸ Yhwh also appears to delight especially in בָּחוּרִים, as is apparent in Isa 9:17 [MT 9:16]. Here the prophet announces that because of the people’s iniquity, Yhwh will no longer

¹⁷⁷ Samson, in Jdg 14:10, is depicted as having a feast before his wedding because that was the custom for בָּחוּרִים. Note, however that this does not specifically state that Samson himself was a בָּחוּר.

¹⁷⁸ Translation mine. This “goodness” may refer to his imposing physique, given that it is immediately followed by a report of Saul’s impressive height. Still, the use of the term טוב indicates a positive evaluation of the בָּחוּר.

rejoice (שמח) in their young men, nor will he have pity on their orphans and widows.

The meaning of the prophecy is that the iniquity of the people has overturned the normal response of the deity to these groups: Yhwh is typically the champion of the orphan and widow (e.g., Hos 14:3 [MT 14:4]) and ordinarily rejoices in young men in this period of their lives.

2.2.2.1.1.3 Sexual maturity and ability to marry

The quality perhaps most frequently associated with בָּחוּרִים is their attainment of the maturity necessary for sexual activity and marriage. This direct association with marriage is seen in two passages in particular. Judges 14:10 describes a banquet that Samson prepares prior to his nuptials with his Philistine bride, a banquet likely associated with the wedding ritual.¹⁷⁹ This celebration is said to be customary for בָּחוּרִים: "...Samson held a banquet there, for בָּחוּרִים do this."¹⁸⁰ A wedding-related celebration, a proto-bachelor party, is therefore explicitly connected with בָּחוּרִים. The connection with marriage also appears in Isa 62:5: "For as a young man [בָּחוּר] marries a young woman [בְּתוּלָה], so shall your builder marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you."

¹⁷⁹ See Niditch, *Judges*, 156.

¹⁸⁰ Translation mine.

There is no feminine form of בָּחוּר to add greater depth to the analysis of this term; however, as is seen in verse just quoted (Isa 62:5), the term בָּחוּרִים is frequently paired with בְּתוּלָה, “young woman.”¹⁸¹ Investigation of this common word pair further emphasizes the connection of בָּחוּר to marriage. The consensus among scholars who have studied the term בְּתוּלָה is that בְּתוּלוֹת are not necessarily virgins (otherwise there would be no need to add the phrase “who has not known a man” after the term in Gen 24:16; Judg 19:39; 21:12) but are certainly “girls of marriageable age.”¹⁸² The pairing of these terms supports the identification of בָּחוּרִים as “young men of a marriageable age.”¹⁸³

The sexual desirability accompanying the attainment of sexual maturity appears in Ezek 23:6, where Oholah’s metaphorical Assyrian lovers are described as בָּחוּרֵי חֶמֶד (“desirable young men”) and also in Ruth 3:10, where Boaz blesses Ruth for not “going

¹⁸¹ See Deut 32:25; Isa 23:4; Jer 31:13; 51:22; Ezek 9:6; Amos 8:13; Zech 9:17; Ps 78:63; 148:12; Lam 1:18; 2:21; 2 Chr 36:17.

¹⁸² Tikva Frymer-Kensky, “Virginity in the Bible,” in *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (ed. Victor H. Matthews, Bernard M. Levinson, and Tikva Frymer-Kensky; JSOTSup 262; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 79-80.

¹⁸³ Unlike with young women, the actual sexual experience of these young men is of no concern in the HB. There are no terms, in other words, that specifically denote male virginity; and sexual experience seems not to function as an important moment signifying a boy’s transition to manhood as it often does in the modern West. See Steinberg (*World of the Child*, 59), who argues that “[virginity] does not appear to be essential in the construction of childhood for Israelite boys,” which she claims to be the case partly because “there would be no physical means to track the virginity of a son.”

after” the בַּחֲוִירִים, a noteworthy action only if pursuing these young men presents a temptation for Ruth.

Finally, the tragic image of Lam 5:13, in which the בַּחֲוִירִים of Jerusalem are forced by oppressors into the traditionally female occupation of grinding grain, achieves its force through an assumption of the already developed sexual maturity of these individuals.¹⁸⁴ The depiction of a defeated enemy as emasculated is a common trope in ancient Near Eastern literary and visual texts (see above, pp. 75-77), and this emasculation can often be achieved through the imagery of grinding grain (cf. Samson’s forced labor in Judg 16:21).¹⁸⁵ The poet of Lamentations draws upon an image of emasculation; but it is noteworthy that for emasculation to have any rhetorical impact, the objects of emasculation must previously have been considered fully and robustly masculine. Certainly symbolically emasculating a male child who is embedded in the world of women, and is therefore already associated with them, would not achieve such an impact.

¹⁸⁴ See above, 76-77.

¹⁸⁵ See Niditch, *Judges*, 171, and van der Toorn “Judges XVI,” 249, 252 n. 9.

2.2.2.1.2 Summary

The **בַּחוּרִים**, then, are clearly removed from the characteristics of childhood that predominate in the nuances of the other terms applied to the young. The **בַּחוּר** is consistently depicted as physically strong, and he is often actively involved in military endeavors as a warrior (i.e. not as an aide or squire, as is often the case with the **נָעַר**). This period of life is valued highly in biblical texts, being viewed as the “prime” of the male life: a time where the carefree nature of youth briefly overlaps with the advanced physical development of adulthood. Most significantly, the **בַּחוּר** is considered sexually mature and desirable, of a marriageable age, and possessing all the qualities of the fully developed masculine adult save for marriage and children.

2.2.2.2 עֶלְמָם

The final term to consider is **עֶלְמָם**. Unlike the other terms for male youth, this term occurs more often (seven times) in its feminine form, **עֶלְמָה**, than in the masculine (twice).¹⁸⁶ Greater attention has probably been given to the feminine form because it is found in the Immanuel prophecy of Isa 7:14: “Look, the young woman (**עֶלְמָה**) is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.” Given the significance of this

¹⁸⁶ The seven occurrences of the feminine form exclude occurrences of the musical instruction **עַל־עֲלָמוֹת** before certain psalms (46:1; 48:15) and in 1 Chr 15:20, which BDB (“**עֶלְמָה**,” 761) suggests may refer to the “voice of young women,” i.e. soprano or falsetto.

verse to the Christian belief in Jesus' virgin birth (see Matt 1:23), Christian scholars throughout history have frequently attempted to define *עַלְמָה* as "virgin."¹⁸⁷ However, after examining every occurrence of *עַלְמָה*, *עַלְמָה*, and the related abstract noun *עַלְוִימִים* in the HB—as well as evidence from cognate languages—most scholars now consider this connection with virginity indefensible.¹⁸⁸

Far from representing "virginity," the terms *עַלְמָה* and *עַלְמָה* instead are closely associated with the ideas of *fecundity* and *virility* in biblical Hebrew and in cognate Semitic languages. Scholars contend that the two terms are related to Jewish Aramaic *עַלְמָא* "strong," Arabic *galima* "to be or become filled with passionate desire,"¹⁸⁹ and even classical Hebrew *חֵלֶם* "to be vigorous/healthy" (Isa 38:16 and Job 39:4).¹⁹⁰ Walton argues that not only do later cognate terms stress the connotations of strength and virility associated with *עַלְמָה* and *עַלְמָה*, but these terms themselves as they are used in the HB "refer explicitly to childbearing interests and status."¹⁹¹ To prove this point he looks

¹⁸⁷ For the early Christian equation of *עַלְמָה* and "virgin," see Adam Kamesar, "The Virgin of Isaiah 7:14: The Philological Argument From the Second to the Fifth Century," *JTS* 41 (1990): 51-75. For a more recent attempt to make this connection, see Richard Niessen, "The Virginity of the *עַלְמָה* in Isaiah 7:14," *BSac* 137 (1980): 133-50.

¹⁸⁸ See, e.g., Christoph Dohmen and Helmer Ringgren, "*עַלְמָה*," *TDOT* 11:160-63, and John H. Walton "*עַלְוִימִים*," *NIDOTTE* 3:418.

¹⁸⁹ L. Koehler, "*עַלְמָה* III," *HALOT* 2:835.

¹⁹⁰ See K. Beyer, *Die Aramäischen Texte vom Toten Meer* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1984), 508.

¹⁹¹ Walton, "*עַלְוִימִים*," 3:418.

to Cant 6:8, where **עַלְמוֹת** are grouped together with concubines and queens, presumably in a stereotyped phrase that derives from the practices of the royal harem.¹⁹² For Walton, *queens* are women married to kings for political/alliance purposes, *concubines* are sexual slaves, and **עַלְמוֹת** are those whose main purpose in the harem was to bear children.

Furthermore, he shows that childbearing is the “pivotal issue” with regard to the mention of **עַלְמָה** in Isa 7:4 (the Immanuel prophecy), as well as in the use of the abstract noun in Isa 54:4.¹⁹³ Similarly, two of the other three instances of the abstract noun (Ps 89:47 [MT 89:46]; Job 20:11) seem to refer to the virility and vigor of males—Ps 89:47 laments the shame of having youthful virility cut off, while the vigorous bones of youth are contrasted to dead bones in Job 20:11. With Walton, therefore, we can conclude that the “common ground” that unites all occurrences of the terms **עַלְמָה** and **עַלְמָה** is the “potential for procreative activity,” suggesting that these terms were applied to post-pubertal youths.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² Ibid., 417. Dohmen (“**עַלְמָה**,” 11:116) concurs, writing that these three form a “triad” expressing “the legal status of the various women belonging to the royal harem.”

¹⁹³ Walton, “**עַלְמוֹת**,” 3:417.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 418.

2.2.2.2.1 *Similarity to בָּחוּר*

Since עָלָם describes older boys who have matured sexually and are of marriageable age, and since the term carries connotations of vigor and strength, it shares many features with בָּחוּר. In fact, just as with בָּחוּר, the period of life described with עָלָם (an abstract noun semantically related to עָלָם) is one that is idealized as a man's "prime." This is evident in Job 33:26—where a man's return to the days of his youth is depicted as a wondrous blessing from God—and even more so in Prov 30:18-19. Reading with the LXX, Syriac, Vulgate, and Arabic versions, the latter passage takes on a much different and more understandable meaning than in the MT. The NRSV of Prov 30:18-19, which translates from MT, reads: "Three things are too wonderful for me; four I do not understand: the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a snake on a rock, the way of a ship on the high seas, and the way of a man with a girl." Following the other textual witnesses means altering only one word: the final בְּעֶלְמָה "with a girl." It would appear that the *Vorlage* behind the alternative textual witnesses instead reads בְּעֶלְמָיו, "in his youth." Following these versions clears up the confusion that the MT engenders,¹⁹⁵ with the relationship among the four events becoming much clearer: each portrays a

¹⁹⁵ For an overview of the many suggestions made by scholars to explain the impenetrable MT, see Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 18B; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 870-71.

creature or entity at their most majestic, doing the things for which they are most heralded (a soaring eagle, a snake somehow moving without legs or feet, a manmade ship defying the fearful sea, and a young man at the height of his virility).

The characteristics of the עָלָם (virility, advanced physical development, and the view of this time as a young man's "prime") suggest that the term is practically synonymous with בָּחוּר (a term that denotes strength, sexual maturity, and a young man's "prime"). This close association of עָלָם with בָּחוּר, however, faces a potential objection that must be addressed: each instance of the term עָלָם appears to be used as a synonym for נָעַר. If these two were synonymous, the age range covered by עָלָם would be skewed downward to include younger boys, and would therefore call into question the association between עָלָם and בָּחוּר—since the later term clearly describes older male youths.¹⁹⁶

The first instance in which עָלָם seems to be equated with נָעַר is in 1 Sam 17, where Saul calls David an עָלָם in v. 56 but refers to him as a נָעַר in vv. 55 and 58.

However, closer inspection reveals that it is not altogether clear that נָעַר and עָלָם are

¹⁹⁶ Note, however, that uniquely among the terms discussed above, נָעַר covers a broad age range. When those instances where נָעַר signifies "servant" are removed, the age range is from unborn child to seventeen. Thus a more physically developed young man in his late teens may be referred to with both terms נָעַר and עָלָם, provided he is at the upper end of the age spectrum of נָעַר.

synonyms in this case. Indeed, as the discussion of the David and Goliath story in chapter 3 shows, Saul's use of the term עָלָם in 1 Sam 17:56 likely represents a major change in his estimation of David, who moves from being referred to as a נֶעֶר to being labeled with a term that has more connotations of greater maturity: עָלָם.

The second and last instance where עָלָם appears to be synonymous with נֶעֶר is in 1 Sam 20. In v. 22, Jonathan refers to an עָלָם who seems to be the same person as the נֶעֶר mentioned twelve other times in the chapter (20:21, 35-41). However, these two characters may not be the same. Jonathan, at this stage in the narrative, is informing David of the details of his plan to communicate with him in the near future through a code that only they will know: David is to hide behind a stone while Jonathan feigns at target practice with his bow and arrow. If King Saul's anger toward David has cooled, Jonathan would call out to the young assistant with him fetching his arrows that they are to be found on one side of the stone, while if David is in danger, Jonathan would tell the assistant that they are beyond where he currently stands. The assistant Jonathan brings with him to participate in this feigned target practice is a נֶעֶר קָטָן "a small boy" (v. 35). However, when the עָלָם is mentioned in v. 22, the plan is still hypothetical. Thus, Jonathan is unsure of the age of the assistant who would accompany him when he goes out to communicate with David. He thus wisely covers both options: *either* a younger

boy will accompany him (v. 21), *or* an older youth (v. 22).¹⁹⁷ Thus, for the reasons outlined here, the claim that the noun עָלָם describes an older male youth is not weakened by the apparent association of the term with the noun נָעַר.

2.2.2.2.2 Summary

In sum, the term עָלָם describes young men who are at stage of physical development more advanced than very young boys. They are sexually mature (i.e., post-pubertal) and ready for marriage. The term is not associated with virginity, but instead with virility and strength. This period in the male life cycle is often considered a man's "prime." Therefore, עָלָם appears to describe the same stage of male development as בָּחוּר.

2.2.3 Conclusions about Biblical Boyhood

Some conclusions can be reached on the approximately twenty-year time span prior to mature manhood in the HB that may be broadly labeled "biblical boyhood." The

¹⁹⁷ Note also that abstract nouns derived from עָלָם and נָעַר are paralleled in Job 33:25: "let his skin become fresher than in youth [מִנְעָר]; let him return to the days of his virile youth [עֲלֹמָיו]." Here too the two words need to be considered as synonyms. Certainly Hebrew poetry has more techniques at its disposal than simple synonymous "thought rhymes," as Robert Alter puts it (*The Art of Biblical Poetry* [New York: Basic Books, 1985], 9). Indeed, this verse may be a classic example of Alter's "developmental impulse of biblical verse" (ibid., 17), where the move from the first verset to the second involves a move from the general (נָעַר, an abstract noun derived from a term with a rather large age-window) to the more specific (עֲלֹמָיו, a term describing a more limited, and older, age range).

first is that the category of biblical boyhood can be divided into two groups: young boys (those younger than approximately thirteen years old) and older boys/young men (from approximately thirteen years old to twenty years old).

The first group consists of boys referred to by *עֹלִי* and its derivative terms, *יֹנֵק*, *גָּמֹול*, *טף*, and in many cases, *נֶעֶר*.¹⁹⁸ A clear similarity exists among the characteristics associated with the male youths for whom these terms are used: their vulnerability and endangerment, and their lack of both social authority and wisdom. However, even within this group of young boys (i.e., boys under the age of thirteen, approximately) some slight differences in characterization are evident. Certain of these terms which describe very young boys—*עֹלִי*, *יֹנֵק*, *גָּמֹול*, and *טף*, specifically—are frequently associated with women, an association that is not so evident for the slightly older boys called *יָלֵד* or *נֶעֶר*.¹⁹⁹ Additionally, the four terms for very young children (*עֹלִי*, *יֹנֵק*, *גָּמֹול*, and *טף*) are not gendered beyond the grammatical gender given to every Hebrew noun. In other

¹⁹⁸ The term *נֶעֶר* cannot be fit into either of the proposed groups in this schema, as it encompasses such a large age window (birth-approximately twenty years of age). However, the characteristics that are ascribed to the term (physical weakness, lack of authority, impetuousness, lack of wisdom, beauty) would seem to put it in the first, younger group. Context is the only guide when attempting to recognize whether a character referred to as a *נֶעֶר* is better understood as belonging to this group of young children, or the latter group of older youths.

¹⁹⁹ But note that both of these terms have comparably wide age ranges, and thus are not always used of older youths. Still, they can and do often describe older boys, *יָלֵד* having an age range that can extend to approximately twelve years of age, and *נֶעֶר* even reaching to approximately twenty.

words, the children described by these terms are essentially “pre-gender,” unlike the slightly older יְלָדִים and נְעָרִים (both words that have masculine and feminine forms) with which they are grouped. Another difference among the terms in this group of “young boys” is that a predilection for rash and violent actions is more common to the slightly older boys (יְלָדִים and נְעָרִים), and their fresh and youthful complexion is the frequent subject of praise. These slight differences, however, do not preclude the grouping of these terms together into a single group as “young boys,” a group that contains pre-pubescent boys from birth until approximately age twelve.

The second group consists of older boys from approximately age thirteen to twenty for whom the terms בָּחוּר and עָלָם are used. The description of young men in this group is characterized by their physical strength, and often this lifecycle phase is understood as the physical “prime” of a man’s life. Youths in this group are unmarried and childless, but their virile sexuality is emphasized. They are also old enough to engage in military exploits. These characteristics distinguish the older boys in this category from their younger counterparts in the first group and in fact associate them much more with fully adult males. However, since the youths in this category lack a fundamental characteristic of Israelite masculinity—marriage and children—they cannot be considered fully men. Instead, the label “older boys/young men” more appropriately

fits this group, distinguishing it from “young boyhood,” but also recognizing that it is not yet fully manhood.²⁰⁰

With a more refined definition of “biblical boyhood” now in place, this investigation can turn to a comparison between boyhood and manhood in the HB.

²⁰⁰ In proposing a two-stage schema of biblical boyhood (“young boys” and “older boys/young men”) this analysis is in agreement with the work of other scholars who have addressed the matter of the male life cycle in the HB. Hans Walter Wolff’s conception of the life cycle in the HB includes a similar two-stage childhood, consisting of “children” (in which he includes יְנֻקִּים alongside נְעָרִים and טַף) and “young but fully grown men and grown up girls” (consisting of בָּחוּרִים and בְּתוּלוֹת). See Wolff, *Anthropology*, 120. Eng’s schema is also similar, although he divides the larger group of younger children into two smaller groups, those who have been weaned and those who have not. The older group, consisting of בָּחוּרִים, he defines as “youth/young adulthood.” See Eng, *Days of Our Years*, 57. Both Eng and Wolff appeal to such biblical passages as Ezek 9:6; Jer 6:11; and 51:22 to justify this separation because each distinguishes between older youths (described with the noun בָּחוּר) and young children (טַף in Ezek 9:6; עוֹלָל in Jer 6:11; נֶעֶר in Jer 51:22).

Indeed, this division of boyhood into two or three groups is remarkably consistent among ancient and even modern cultures. Johannes Louw and Eugene Nida, scholars of biblical Greek, emphasize that: “Languages employ a number of different terms for the age-grading of males. Some of the most common distinctions involve the following: (1) male baby boys up to the time of weaning; (2) boys from the age of weaning to the time of puberty rites, when they are recognized as being sexually capable; (3) from puberty to the time of marriage...” See L&N, 107-8. This quote was brought to my attention by Eng, *Days of Our Years*, 56-57.

Comparative evidence from the ancient Near East also shows this general separation of young males into sub-categories. For example, John A. Brinkman’s study of Middle Babylonian personnel rosters (“Sex, Age, and Physical Condition Designations for Servile Laborers in the Middle Babylonian Period: A Preliminary Survey,” in *Zikir Šumim: Assyriological Studies Presented to F. R. Kraus* [ed. G. van Driel et. al.; Leiden: Brill, 1982], 2) reveals three groups, adolescent (*guruš.tur*), weaned child (*pīrsu*), and suckling child (*dumu gaba*). Interestingly, he also notes that adolescents are considered much closer to adults than to children in that they “often performed the same tasks as adults and were given correspondingly large rations” (ibid.). Sumerian ration lists, according to Marten Stol (“Private Life in Ancient Mesopotamia,” *CANE* 1:485), likewise separate children into three groups: birth to five years, five to ten years, and ten to thirteen years.

2.3 *Comparing Boyhood and Manhood in the Hebrew Bible*

Identifying the coming-of-age theme in the HB requires familiarity with the characteristic features of biblical boyhood and manhood so that the exegete can recognize when an individual character puts aside boyishness and begins to act like a mature man. The investigation of boyhood and manhood above reveals fundamental differences between the two that are frequently emphasized in the coming-of-age narratives discussed in the following chapters.

The contrasts between idealized, hegemonic biblical masculinity and boys in the first group identified above (“young boys” referred to with the terms *גִּמּוּל*, *יוֹנֵק*, *עוֹלָל*, *יָלֵד*, *טף*, and often *נַעַר*) are especially stark. Young boys in the HB are vulnerable and endangered; biblical men are physically strong and self-sufficient. On the battlefield, a young boy is characterized by fear (Judg 8:20), whereas a man displays courage (1 Sam 4:9).²⁰¹ Young boys are frequently shown at play, while men must work. Authority within the society is in the hands of men, not boys. A man must be wise, but young boys exhibit a lack of wisdom. The youthful complexion is praised, whereas the physical

²⁰¹ Note that not all “fear” (*יִרָא*) is considered boyish in the HB. While the fear of going into battle—and particularly of killing in battle (Judge 8:20)—is associated with boys (see above, 111-12), a man can also fear. For example, Gideon’s fear is a repeated theme in Judg 6-8 (e.g., Judg 6:27; 7:10), yet he is still considered a mighty man of valor (*גִּבּוֹר*; Judg 6:12). The key difference seems to be that boys are afraid of acting/killing, but men are afraid of being acted upon/killed.

appearance of men elicits comment mainly for its strength or imposing quality (1 Sam 9:2; 17:4-7). Men must exercise self-control, while boys are given to impetuous acts. Young boys live in the domestic space dominated by women and thus are more associated with them; men are found in the company of their fellow men with whom they stand in solidarity, and they eschew excessive contact with women. Finally, very young male children (those described with the terms עֹל, יוֹנָק, גִּמּוּל, and טֶף) are often not gendered in the terms used to describe them, while men in the HB are constantly measured against a hegemonic masculine ideal.

Comparing older boys/young men—the second group within the larger category of boyhood, for whom the terms בָּחוּר and עֶלֶם are used—with adult men in the HB reveals far fewer contrasts. Like men, older boys are praised for their strength, and are frequently depicted engaging in military exploits. To be sure, many of the other characteristics of biblical manhood (such as wisdom, self-control, or kinship solidarity) are not explicitly mentioned as belonging also to these older boys; however, nowhere are older boys and young men depicted displaying the opposite qualities (i.e., foolishness, impetuosity, etc.) as their counterparts in the group of “young boys” often are. Indeed, it appears that older boys/young men differ from adult men in only one major way: they are unmarried and childless.

Perhaps because of the comparatively minor differences between older boys/young men and adult men, none of the coming-of-age stories identified in the following chapters depict the transition of an עָלָם or a בָּחוּר into manhood. Biblical coming-of-age narratives instead depict a more dramatic and noticeable change than that between a young man and an adult man—since this would seemingly only entail a simple report of marriage and the birth of children. The coming-of-age narratives discussed in the following analysis depict boys who undergo a maturation in the course of the story that significantly alters them, in which they change from being described with characteristics similar to those of the group of younger boys analyzed above (such as powerlessness, association with women, etc.) to displaying the qualities associated with both men and older boys. In one case (David in 1 Sam 17), this maturation is described as a change from young boyhood (נָעַר; 1 Sam 17:33, 42) to older boyhood (עָלָם; v. 56); but more often the narratives end with the boy who was previously shown in very childish ways being recognized as a fully adult man.²⁰²

²⁰² Presumably the preference for depicting a young boy transitioning to manhood as opposed to older boyhood/young manhood in these stories could be a result of a desire for greater dramatic effect—showing a transition from tender and inexperienced boyhood to virile manhood being a more exciting tale than just describing the boy transitioning from one phase of youth to another. Alternatively, this could be because in two cases (that of Moses in Exod 2 and Solomon in 1 Kgs 1-2), the coming-of-age stories end with marriage reports (thus older boyhood terminology would not apply), and in the other two (Solomon in 1 Kgs 3 and Samuel in 1 Sam 3) the stories conclude with the conferring of an important vocation on the boy (king in

In the next chapter, the identification of coming-of-age narratives in the HB begins with the discussion of three stories of royal coming-of-age: David in 1 Sam 17, Solomon in 1 Kgs 1-2, and an alternative tale of Solomon's maturation in 1 Kgs 3.

Solomon's case, prophet in Samuel's), thus manhood terminology would be more appropriate than any boyhood terminology—even if associated with more developed older boys.

Chapter 3: David and Solomon: Case Studies of Royal Maturation

In the previous chapter, I delineated and compared the characteristic features of manhood and boyhood in the HB. This chapter will examine both the story of David and Goliath (1 Sam 17) and that of the early years of Solomon's reign (1 Kgs 1-3), and it will draw upon the conclusions of chapter 2 to demonstrate that David and Solomon both transition from boyhood to manhood in the course of the narratives. In short, these stories are concerned with narrating their protagonist's coming-of-age.

My purpose is to identify and highlight the importance of the coming-of-age theme in 1 Sam 17 and 1 Kgs 1-3. After detailing how this theme is utilized in each story, the final portion of the chapter compares the two narratives. This comparison will also address the varying constructions of masculinity displayed in these narratives, given that male coming-of-age stories can provide a unique glimpse into this subject, as I have shown previously.¹ The chapter ends with a brief discussion of how the evolution in the

¹ See chapter 1, 33-37. Moreover, Hamilton contends that stories told about kings in the HB can also illuminate "normative masculinity" in Israel, since the king represents a model for masculine emulation (Mark W. Hamilton, *The Body Royal: The Social Poetics of Kingship in Ancient Israel* [Leiden: Brill, 2005], 30). In light of Hamilton's work, then, the story of a king's coming-of-age—like those of David and Solomon described below—may provide more than just a view of hegemonic biblical masculinity. Instead, these stories may give insight into the understanding of masculinity among the majority of Israelite men, not just the elite who committed the stories to writing. Note also that since the David and Goliath story may

coming-of-age theme observed in these stories indicates a thematic shift in Israel's historical narrative and possibly a change in the biblical construction of masculinity over time.

3.1 "Give Me a Man, That We May Fight Together:" David's Coming-of-Age in 1 Samuel 17

The first example of royal coming-of-age is the famous story of David and Goliath in 1 Sam 17.² In this narrative, David's characterization undergoes a crucial transformation. The narrator employs youthful imagery to portray David prior to this point in 1 Samuel, but this imagery is entirely absent after David's victory over Goliath. In fact, David is never referred to as a boy again in the HB after 1 Sam 17.³ Drawing on that sharp literary demarcation, I investigate how the narrator draws attention to the

likely have a folkloric origin (see 179-81) its articulation of masculinity may also reflect the views of manhood held by the majority of Israelite men. This claim, however, must necessarily remain speculative.

² "1 Sam 17" and "the David and Goliath story" are used interchangeably throughout this chapter. In addition, I will argue later that the story actually concludes in 1 Sam 18:9. Thus, "1 Sam 17" or "the David and Goliath story" is equivalent to "1 Sam 17-18:9."

³ Berquist argues that while David experiences a "moment of borrowed adulthood" after defeating Goliath, he regresses to adolescence afterwards and does not become a man once and for all until he is crowned king (Jon L. Berquist, "Childhood and Age in the Bible," *Pastoral Psychology* 58 [2009]: 526). *Pace* Berquist, I argue below that David demonstrates all of the characteristics of biblical masculinity by the end of the David and Goliath narrative and the text never reverts to describing him as a boy.

coming-of-age theme in 1 Sam 17 and analyze how this particular story understands manhood, including what it takes to become a man.

Before arguing that 1 Sam 17 represents David's coming-of-age story, it is critical to consider and ultimately dismiss a fundamental critique of my proposed reading. Simply stated, this critique claims that the David of 1 Sam 17 is not a young and untested shepherd boy who is naïve to the brutal realities of war but is already depicted as a man.⁴ If David is viewed as a man by the time of his duel with Goliath, then no coming-of-age theme is possible in 1 Sam 17. Therefore, I must address this contrary view and marshal sufficient evidence to dismantle it.

Proponents of the view that David is characterized as a man in 1 Sam 17 typically argue that the preceding chapter also depicts him as a man. Specifically, 1 Sam 16:18 identifies him as both a גִּבּוֹר חַיִּל (traditionally translated as "a mighty man of valor;" see e.g., KJV, NAS) and an אִישׁ מִלְחָמָה (literally, "a man of war"). These titles are applied to David *prior to his duel with Goliath*, which suggests that David was far from being a

⁴ Campbell is among the most vocal critics of the traditional interpretation that views David as a youth in 1 Sam 17. He contends that this reading has "bedeviled" interpretation throughout the years (Anthony F. Campbell, S. J., *1 Samuel* [FOTL 7; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003], 171). Moreover, Campbell argues that in David's fight with Goliath, he "is no little boy" but is instead "portrayed as fast, tough and strong, with excellent reflexes" (ibid., 181). For similar views, see also McKenzie (Steven L. McKenzie, *King David: A Biography* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000], 50-51) and Halpern (Baruch Halpern, *David's Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001], 12-13).

callow boy when he fought the Philistine champion. Furthermore, in this view the references to David as a נַעַר throughout 1 Sam 17 (vv. 33, 42, 55, 58; cf. 16:11, 18) are best understood in light of the occasional military use of this multivalent term; David is therefore described here as a “squire,” not as a “boy.”⁵ Even David’s use of a slingshot when battling Goliath is not a choice indicative of his youthful lack of facility with more “manly weapons”; on the contrary, it is the sound tactical choice of a thoughtful and adept warrior.⁶

A closer examination of the text of 1 Sam 17, however, reveals significant deficiencies in the preceding argument and reinforces the traditional understanding of David as a boy — albeit a precocious one — when he battles Goliath. The first and most obvious indication of David’s youth is that while “all the men of Israel” are bivouacked with Saul in the Elah valley at the beginning of the tale (1 Sam 17:19; cf. 17:2), David is *not* among them but is instead with his father Jesse in Bethlehem. David is therefore not

⁵ See the discussion of the many uses of נַעַר in chapter 2, 97 n. 88. The association of the term with the military rank of squire is apparent in certain texts, as shown by MacDonald (“Status,” 147-70). However, I demonstrated in chapter 2 that besides this meaning, the noun’s more common use is as a life-cycle term denoting youth. In addition, I will show in the subsequent discussion that this latter meaning better fits the context of the term’s use in 1 Sam 17.

⁶ Halpern emphasizes that in ancient Near Eastern warfare, light infantry — defined by its speed, maneuverability, and the use of ranged weapons like the slingshot — was often the perfect answer to heavy infantry unaided by cavalry. David’s choice to fight the heavily armored Philistine armed only with a slingshot and without protective armor makes sense in light of this knowledge and is therefore indicative of David’s tactical brilliance (Halpern, *Secret Demons*, 11-13).

reckoned as a “man of Israel” at this point. Furthermore, according to vv. 13-14, only the three eldest of Jesse’s eight sons are with the men of Israel in Saul’s army. It would seem then that David is significantly younger than the age at which one could serve in the army among the “men of Israel,” since even four of his *older* brothers are still too young to join Saul’s force.⁷

Second, the scene in which David presents himself before Saul to persuade the king that he should be permitted to fight Goliath (vv. 32-40) contains several indicators of David’s youth. To begin with, if David is a mighty man and fearsome warrior in 1 Sam 17, it is unlikely that he would need to argue for his suitability to duel with the Philistine; yet this is precisely what David does here—making his case over Saul’s strong objections (v. 33). Similarly, a warrior would not reference his experience fighting animals as his best qualification for the job of fighting Goliath (vv. 34-39), nor would he be unaccustomed to a soldier’s armor (vv. 38-39). Finally, if a slingshot were such a tactically superior weapon against a heavily armored foe—as opposed to the meek weapon of a shepherd boy that just happened to be the best choice for the situation—it is curious that the veteran warrior Saul (1 Sam 11-15) does not recognize this, and instead insists that David arm himself with a sword and heavy armor.

⁷ An observation first made by Folker Willeson (“The Yalid in Hebrew Society,” *ST* 12 [1958]: 202).

Third, the cold reception David encounters by his eldest brother Eliab upon his arrival at the camp again supports the observation that David is characterized as youthful in the narrative of 1 Sam 17. Eliab's anger toward David hinges on his conviction that David does not belong with the army, but with the "few sheep in the wilderness" (v. 28) he has left behind. The message is clear that Eliab believes that the menial task of tending the sheep is more appropriate for the boy David than the "man's work" of fighting in war.

Finally, David's beauty and his ruddy complexion, referred to in v. 42, rely on the common association of youth with beauty.⁸ In fact, the terms used to designate David's attractive appearance are rather rare and are used exclusively in the HB in reference to children. For example, David's ruddiness is described with the adjective אֶדְמוּנִי, a term that is only applied to one other character: Esau, in Gen 25:25. Significantly, the adjective is applied to Esau *as a newborn*. In addition, David is said to be "beautiful to behold"⁹ (יָפֶה מְרֹאֶה), an expression associated with only one other character: Joseph, in Gen 39:6, when he is still young and is referred to as a "boy" (נֶעָר; Gen 37:2). Given the common practice of viewing the youthful body, and particularly

⁸ See chapter 2, 116-118.

⁹ Translation mine.

the youthful complexion, as an aesthetic ideal throughout the HB, David's beauty and notably attractive skin mark him as a youth in biblical literature.

In sum, contrary to scholars who view David as an adult warrior in 1 Sam 17, the evidence shows that David is portrayed as a youth throughout the tale. Therefore, when the term נָעַר is employed in the David and Goliath narrative, it should be understood primarily as a life-cycle term denoting "boy."

Of course, this still leaves the problem of how David could be described as a "mighty man of valor" and a "man of war" in the previous chapter (16:18) when he is clearly a boy in 1 Sam 17. I discuss this issue in greater depth below in the section on the textual criticism of the David and Goliath story. At present, it is worth mentioning that the contradictions discussed above (that arise when reading 1 Sam 17 in light of David's description as a man in 16:14-23) suggest that 1 Sam 16:14-23 may represent a source or tradition unknown to the David and Goliath narrative.

Having identified the flaws with this potential critique of my interpretation of 1 Sam 17, I now present the evidence that supports my reading of the pericope as David's coming-of-age story. To argue for the centrality of the coming-of-age theme in the David and Goliath story requires more than simply showing that David is depicted as a boy in much of the narrative. Specifically, David must also make some clearly identifiable

transition from boyhood to manhood in the story. The discussion below shows that such a transition takes place in the narrative. At times, the tactics the narrator employs to illustrate this transition are recognizable through a straightforward close reading that is attentive to the maturation theme. At other times, the coming-of-age theme is evident only when viewed against the broader narrative structure of the story—particularly, how it imitates the tripartite structure of a rite of passage.

3.1.1 Explicit Narrative Evidence for David’s Transition into Manhood in 1 Sam 17

The narrator of the David and Goliath story explicitly draws attention to the coming-of-age theme in four ways. First the theme’s importance is demonstrated by the narrator’s frequent use of life-cycle terminology in the story, as well as the presence of a significant terminological shift in describing David at the story’s end. Next, David’s transition to manhood is marked by his performance of two uniquely manly tasks: displaying strength on the battlefield and defending his and his nation’s honor. Lastly, the culminating act of masculine maturation—i.e., the act of marriage—is an important theme in the story.

3.1.1.1 Terminology in 1 Sam 17

The first category of evidence pointing to the coming-of-age theme in 1 Sam 17 is terminology. I have already argued that the prevalence of youthful imagery used to describe David in 1 Sam 17 strongly suggests that when the term נָעַר is applied to him, it connotes his boyhood and not his role as a squire or servant. More significantly, while David is frequently referred to as a נָעַר/boy in texts up to and including 1 Sam 17 (the term is used in reference to David by the narrator [17:42], by Samuel [16:11], by Saul's servant [16:18] and by Saul himself [17:33, 55, 58]), David is never again called a נָעַר in the text after 1 Sam 17. This indicates that David experiences a significant change in 1 Sam 17, which makes נָעַר no longer appropriate as an identifying term for him.

Similarly, attention to the text's use of the Hebrew words for boy (נָעַר) and man (אִישׁ) highlights the coming-of-age theme in the story. The text repeatedly acknowledges that only a "man" (אִישׁ) will be able to challenge Goliath: the giant repeatedly demands that a "man" from the Israelites be sent out to fight him (vv. 8, 10); Israelite soldiers inform David about the reward for the "man" who kills Goliath (vv. 25, 27); Saul attempts to dissuade David from challenging Goliath because he is just a boy (נָעַר), implying that to kill Goliath—the "man of war" (אִישׁ מִלְחָמָה)—requires a man (v. 33);

and David himself acknowledges that a “man” will kill the Philistine champion (v. 26).¹⁰ The repetition and interplay between the words אִישׁ and נַעַר indicates that the relationship between boyhood and manhood is crucial to the story.¹¹ This dynamic compels the reader to ask along with the text: “What man will defeat the mighty Philistine champion? If the job requires a man—as every character in the narrative acknowledges—how could a boy be successful?” The answer, towards which the narrative leads the reader, is that a boy can be successful in this task only if in the process of performing it he becomes a man.

The next terminological indicator of David’s transition to manhood is Saul’s use of the rare term עֶלֶם to refer to David at the conclusion of the story (1 Sam 17:56). As the discussion of this noun in chapter 2 showed, עֶלֶם is a term that, along with בָּחוּר, denotes a stage of male development that I labeled “older boyhood/young manhood.” This stage is more advanced than young boyhood, which is more commonly denoted with terms like יָלֵד or—in certain contexts—נַעַר.¹² Indeed, young men referred to with these two terms (עֶלֶם and בָּחוּר) seem to be men in almost every sense of the word, with the notable

¹⁰ It is important to note here that David never refers to himself as a נַעַר in the text; thus his belief that a man will dispatch Goliath can be read as the cocksure declaration of an adolescent male who already considers himself a man.

¹¹ N.B. also the similar tension between the Hebrew adjectives גָּדוֹל and קָטָן (“large” and “small,” respectively) in vv. 13-14.

¹² See chapter 2, 152-55.

exception that they are unmarried. For Saul to switch at the end of the story from addressing David as a נָעַר (v. 33), a term more associated with inexperience, immaturity and weakness, to a term with the connotations of virility and advanced physical development like עָלָם strongly suggests that in Saul's estimation, David has crossed a significant threshold by slaying the Philistine.¹³ David has now moved much closer to manhood, though its full realization only happens with his marriage, which comes shortly after his victory (see below).

However, if the terminological shift from נָעַר to עָלָם in 1 Sam 17:56 indicates Saul's recognition of David's maturation, the question remains why Saul would revert back to calling David a נָעַר in v. 58. At first glance this appears to equate the two terms and thus undermine my argument that the term עָלָם signifies an advanced stage of development beyond boyhood. This problem is mitigated when considering that Saul uses the term עָלָם only when in private conversation with his advisor Abner. The king

¹³ The significance of Saul's terminological shift from referring to David as a נָעַר to later calling him an עָלָם has largely gone unnoticed by scholars. Even as attentive a reader as Fokkerman simply equates the two terms as synonymous for "young man," without recognizing the important differences in connotation (J. P. Fokkerman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel: A Full Interpretation Based on Stylistic and Structural Analyses. Volume II: The Crossing Fates [I Sam. 13-31 & II Sam.1]* [SSN 23; Aasen/Maastricht, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1986], 194). To my knowledge, the only scholar who has commented on the significance of this shift is Edelman, who argues that Saul's use of עָלָם "tends to emphasize his promise that Goliath's slayer would marry a princess, since the word designates a sexually ripe young man" (Diana Vikander Edelman, *King Saul in the Historiography of Judah* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991], 134).

calls David a נער, on the other hand, when David has returned to Saul in v. 58 and is directly addressed by the king. In each case, the context for Saul's speech dictates which term he uses. Within the protected space of a private communication with his ally Abner, Saul is able to let his guard down and speak what he truly believes (i.e., that David has made a significant transition from out of boyhood by slaying the Philistine). However, when David is before the king, holding in his hand the monstrous head of the giant (a silent indictment of the cowardice of Saul and his men), Saul is understandably intimidated. Thus he wishes to "put David in his place," pointedly referring to him in v. 58 as just a boy (נער). Indeed, Saul's question itself in v. 58 ("whose son are you?") demeans David by only ascribing him worth in relation to older men. The awkward addition of the emphatic נער at the end of Saul's question in v. 58 is a further unsubtle jab at the young man, in an attempt to downplay his accomplishment.

3.1.1.2 Battlefield displays of strength and feminization of the enemy in 1 Sam 17

In chapter 2 I established that in the ancient Near East and in biblical literature the battlefield was the ideal stage for the "performance" of masculinity. It was there that the display of a man's bellicose strength vis-à-vis his enemy announced and established his manhood. Moreover, the exertion of power in battle over one's enemy frequently

entailed the metaphorical (and at times literal) feminization of the defeated foe.¹⁴

David's defeat of Goliath in battle, therefore, is a characteristically manly activity through which David shows his fellow Israelites that he has made the transition from boyhood to manhood. His development as a warrior—and therefore as a man—is further highlighted by the contrast between his inability to function in armor prior to the duel with the Philistine (vv. 38-39) and his appropriation after the battle of the defeated Goliath's armor as his own (v. 54).

David's defeat of Goliath also functions as a metaphorical emasculation of the Philistine. The contest of masculinity between enemies on the battlefield, as already mentioned, is a zero-sum game in the ancient Near East: the victor's reaffirmed manhood comes at the cost of the diminished manhood of the conquered foe.¹⁵ Thus the description of Goliath's emasculation at David's hand functions to announce David's entry into manhood—and to burnish his masculine credentials—at the Philistine's expense.

¹⁴ See the discussion of the relationship between strength demonstrated on the battlefield, masculinity, and the feminization of the enemy in chapter 2, 61-67, 75-77.

¹⁵ For a more general discussion regarding why masculinity so often requires defense in battle or competition, and is often demonstrated by feminizing other men, see Alan Dundes, "Traditional Male Combat: From Game to War," in *From Game to War, and Other Psychoanalytic Essays on Folklore* (ed. Alan Dundes; Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 25-45. Dundes's thesis, which draws upon both anthropological and psychological resources, holds that "male competitive attempts to feminize one's opponent in games and war [are] a means of demonstrating masculinity as a reaction to the female-centered conditioning experience from birth through early childhood until adolescence" (ibid., 42).

Goliath's emasculation is portrayed both as a feminization and as metaphorical castration in 1 Sam 17. The brief retrospective summary of the duel in v. 50 reports David's victory over Goliath by declaring that he "overpowered the Philistine" (וַיַּחֲזֹק דָּוִד (מִן־הַפְּלִשְׁתִּי).¹⁶ Significantly, the verbal root חזק is also used with the preposition מִן indicating the verb's object in 2 Sam 13:14, where David's son Amnon rapes his half sister Tamar (וַיַּחֲזֹק מִמֶּנָּה וַיַּעֲנֶה וַיִּשְׁכַּב אֹתָהּ). The narrator's use of a verb-preposition combination such as this—given its association with the violent exertion of sexual dominance against a woman—may serve as rhetorical propaganda depicting Goliath as a feminized sexual victim of the newly-minted man, David. Such erotically-tinged rhetoric may also explain why David approaches Goliath with his "stick in his hand" and a pouch full of stones (v. 40). The apparently phallic description of David's weapons suggests an analogous relationship between them and his genitalia. Just as these weapons will literally overcome the giant, the masculine David's sexual dominance will metaphorically be asserted over the feminized Goliath.

In addition, Goliath's emasculation at David's hands takes the form of a metaphorical castration. In v. 49, David slings his stone towards what is typically interpreted to be the Philistine's forehead; however, it is not clear that this is the proper

¹⁶ Translation mine.

referent of מִצָּחוֹ. Scholars often have speculated on alternative understandings of this term. For instance, Deem suggests that the greaves covering the Philistine's feet, which similarly are referred to with the term מִצָּחָה (v. 6) are the target of David's missile.¹⁷ Sasson, however, notes that מִצָּחוֹ is in the singular, thus making it unlikely that the word would refer to two greaves. Instead, Sasson suggests that the "feet" covered by this מִצָּחָה are in fact the giant's genitals, given the frequent use of רַגְלִים as a euphemism for this part of the body. The proper referent for מִצָּחוֹ, in his view, is the giant's "codpiece" worn to protect his groin.¹⁸ If Sasson is correct in identifying the target of David's slung stone as Goliath's testicles, then the act reflects the common "emasculat[i]on trope" in battlefield images and narrations. David successfully crushes the Philistine's masculinity as his stone sinks into his codpiece crushing his testicles.¹⁹ Finally, David's dispatching of Goliath by using the Philistine's own oversized sword to decapitate him (v. 51) similarly relies upon the symbolic rhetoric of emasculat[i]on: Goliath's symbolic phallus (i.e., his sword) is removed by David and, adding harsh insult to injury, is used to kill him.

¹⁷ Ariella Deem, "And the Stone Sank Into His Forehead: A Note on 1 Samuel 17:49," *VT* 28 (1978): 349-51.

¹⁸ See Jack M. Sasson, "Reflections on an Unusual Practice Reported in ARM X:4," *Or* 93 (1974): 409-10.

¹⁹ By relying on such unconventional tactics in his duel with Goliath, David's actions here also reflect the "wisdom" incumbent upon an ideal biblical man, if that "wisdom" is understood as "savvy" or "cunning."

3.1.1.3 Defense of collective honor in 1 Sam 17

A repeated theme in 1 Sam 17 is the indignity that follows from not responding to Goliath's insults against Israel (vv. 25, 26), its ranks (מַעֲרָכָה; vv. 10, 26, 36, 45), and by extension, its god (v. 45). The root employed to express Goliath's challenge, חָרַף, clearly falls within the semantic field of honor and shame (note its use in parallel with בִּשְׁת ["shame"] in Isa 30:5 and in opposition to the root כָּבַד ["to honor"] in Prov 14:31).²⁰ Goliath's insulting challenge therefore functions as a shaming of the men of Israel. For David in 1 Sam 17:26, the need to remove any reproach from such a shaming insult represents the primary *casus belli* that motivates his duel with the Philistine (see vv. 36, 45). When David defends the collective honor and reputation of Israel—or more specifically the nation's *men*—and its god, he clearly exhibits a central masculine trait to his fellow Israelites.²¹ By doing so, the boy of the early scenes of the story transforms into the young man of its conclusion.

²⁰ The root is often translated inadequately as "to defy" (see NRSV, NAS, NJPS of 1 Sam 17:10), when a translational choice that reflects its connection to the culture of honor and shame is more appropriate. Alter, noting the inadequacy of "defy" in this verse, proposes instead to translate the root with words like "insult," "disgrace," or "shame." (Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* [New York: Norton, 1999], 102).

²¹ See the discussion of the importance of defending honor to biblical masculinity in chapter 2, 85-91. For the connection between reputation and honor (כְּבוֹד), see Moshe Weinfeld, "כְּבוֹד," *TDOT* 7: 26-27.

3.1.1.4 Marriage in 1 Sam 17

The importance of marriage for manhood in biblical literature was examined in chapter 2.²² While it is true that he does not get married until 1 Sam 18:27, David initially secures his marriage into the Saulide royal family by killing Goliath in 1 Sam 17. The story stresses in 1 Sam 17:25 that one of the rewards that will go to the Israelite that kills Goliath is the hand of Saul's daughter. Thus, David's progression toward fully recognized manhood takes a significant step forward when he wins his betrothal to the king's daughter by slaying the Philistine giant.

It is possible, however, that Jonathan's covenant with David, reported immediately after David had finished speaking with Saul (18:1-4), could be viewed as a symbolic marriage. Certainly, it is precisely at this point in the story that the reader would expect Saul's daughter to be introduced to David, since he has just completed the task required to win her hand and is in the presence of the person (Saul) who initially made the offer. Instead of the expected daughter, however, Jonathan is introduced to David at this point, suggesting that Jonathan may function as a metaphorical substitute for David's princess bride. Moreover, the language used to describe their meeting contains echoes of matrimony: Jonathan is said to love (אהב) David and their souls are

²² See chapter 2, 82-84.

bound together (קשר; 1 Sam 18:1). Jonathan also wraps David in his own cloak (18:4), an act associated with marriage elsewhere in the HB (Ruth 3:9; cf. Hos 2:2-3 [MT 2:4-5]).²³ The point of this language may be to advance the “erotic apologetic” that Ackerman has recognized as so vital to the David-Jonathan story, where the text hints at a sexual relationship between the two in order to belittle Jonathan (the feminized partner in the relationship) and by extension the Saulides.²⁴

Whether one can argue for a symbolic marriage between Jonathan and David at the conclusion of the David and Goliath narrative is debatable. Despite this ambiguity, the marriage theme is a prominent one in the story and David’s actions in securing his betrothal here represent a significant movement towards manhood.

3.1.2 David’s Coming-of-Age as a Rite of Passage

The preceding evidence indicates that 1 Sam 17 should be read as a tale about David’s maturation into manhood. The case for this reading is further strengthened in light of the fact that the structure of the story mimics the tripartite structure of a rite of passage (separation, liminality, and reincorporation).

²³ Damrosch similarly argues for viewing the David-Jonathan relationship as a metaphorical marriage (David Damrosch, *The Narrative Covenant: Transformation of Genre in the Growth of Biblical Literature* [San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987], 206).

²⁴ Ackerman, *When Heroes Love*, 218-27.

As discussed in chapter 1, ever since Turner imported concepts from research into rites of passage to narrative criticism, scholars have applied the model of rites of passage in their analysis of certain biblical texts—even those with no recognizable connection to actual rituals in Israelite society. Indeed, portions of the David story have been the subject of such an analysis. Ackerman's *When Heroes Love*, for example, employs a rite-of-passage hermeneutic to large sections of the David narrative and finds the concept of "liminality" useful for describing aspects of David's characterization, as well as the relationship between David and Jonathan.

Ackerman's discussion suffers, however, from what can be described as "pan-liminalism:" the tendency to focus primarily on the middle stage of a rite of passage (liminality) at the expense of the other equally important phases of separation and reincorporation. In fact, Ackerman so emphasizes the liminal stage that she finds elements of liminality in David's character nearly everywhere—from the time he is introduced in 1 Sam 16 until the time he is crowned king of a united Judah and Israel in 2 Sam 5.²⁵ Such pan-liminalism, which stretches the liminal state to include decades of a

²⁵ Ibid., 200-216.

character's life, dilutes the effectiveness of a rite-of-passage analysis of the David story.²⁶

It is instead preferable to limit the scope of such an analysis to a smaller block of narrative, particularly one where liminality is not the only stage of a rite of passage that is on display, but so too are the stages of separation and reincorporation. Furthermore, given that the concept of rites of passage was first applied to maturation and puberty rituals more than any other rite (as I discussed in chapter 1), a biblical text recounting a character's coming-of-age may be the most appropriate kind of text to which a rite-of-passage analysis can be applied.²⁷

First Samuel 17-18:9 fits all of these desired criteria (i.e., brevity, the presence of all three stages of a typical rite of passage, and the potential for reading the story as a coming-of-age narrative). Beyond that, another feature of this story—as many scholars have observed—identifies this text as an especially promising candidate for a rite-of-passage-informed exegesis: the similarity of the story to a traditional folktale.²⁸ For

²⁶ After speculating on David's liminality, Ackerman eventually concludes that even though liminality does characterize David in the story, it is not as obvious a narrative strategy in 1-2 Samuel as it is in the Epic of Gilgamesh—the other story to which she applies a rite-of-passage hermeneutic (ibid., 213-18).

²⁷ It is not my contention that since 1 Sam 17-18:9 appears to be a coming-of-age story, it follows that a rites of passage exegesis must be applied to it. I am instead articulating a desideratum in biblical studies: maturation rites are the most frequently mentioned rites of passage in van Gennepe's work; therefore it is curious that scholars only rarely have applied a rite-of-passage exegesis to a biblical story in order to illuminate a coming-of-age theme. My reading attempts to fill this lacuna.

²⁸ See Alexander Rofé ("The Battle of David and Goliath: Folklore, Theology, Eschatology," in *Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel* [ed. Jacob Neusner, Baruch A. Levine, and Ernest S. Frerichs; Philadelphia:

example, Jason shows how 1 Sam 17—with its monstrous enemy, young hero, and princess bride—corresponds exactly to the characteristic morphological elements and roles of a fairy tale, as famously identified by Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp.²⁹ Moreover, recent studies that suggest the antiquity of the tale (indicated by its long historical memory of certain details that would have been anachronistic at a later date) support the recognition of a “folkloric core” at the heart of the story, because the older a story is, the greater the likelihood of its origins in folklore.³⁰

Fortress, 1987], 118), who argues that the original story of David and Goliath was a “popular fairy tale” that was later reworked to include an explicitly theological message. This opinion is also shared by Jason, who refers to the tale as a folkloric “romantic epic” (Heda Jason, “The Story of David and Goliath: A Folk Epic?,” *Bib* 60 [1979]: 36-90). Lust also labels one of the two sources he identifies within the chapter a “fairy tale” (Johan Lust, “The Story of David and Goliath in Hebrew and in Greek,” in *The Story of David and Goliath: Textual and Literary Criticism. Papers of a Joint Research Venture* [ed. Dominique Barthélemy et al.; OBO 73; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht / Freiburg: Éditions Universitaires, 1986], 13). DeVries likewise identifies the early version of the story as a “simple hero-saga” told among the common folk (Simon J. De Vries, “David’s Victory over the Philistine as Saga and as Legend,” *JBL* 92 [1973]: 31). Isser stresses the folkloric origins of the story and considers it a “popular heroic legend” (Stanley Isser, *The Sword of Goliath: David in Heroic Literature* [SBLStBl 6; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003], 28-34).

²⁹ Jason, “Folk Epic,” 42-43. For Propp’s original argument for the morphological similarities of all folktales, see Vladimir I. Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale* (trans. L. Scott; 2d ed.; Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968).

³⁰ A number of recent studies argue for the early composition of this story. This claim is in contrast to the trend in the last decade to perceive the tale as a comparatively late imitation of the Homeric “contest of champions” trope, as in the work of Finkelstein and Silberman (Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, *David and Solomon: In Search of the Bible’s Sacred Kings and the Roots of Western Tradition* [New York: Free Press, 2006], 197-99) and Azzan Yadin (“Goliath’s Armor and Israelite Collective Memory,” *VT* 54 [2004]: 373-95). The claim that a “contest of champions” like that between David and Goliath can only be an imitation of Homeric style is convincingly disproven by Frolov and Wright. They show the presence of such duels in ancient Near Eastern literature going back as far as the Epic of Gilgamesh (Serge Frolov and Allen

The relevance of this genre identification to my argument is simple: folk and fairy tales lend themselves well to an analysis informed by rites of passage. Eliade was among the first to argue that the folktale “takes up and continues ‘initiation’” on a narrative plane.³¹ Propp too connects his paradigmatic folktale morphology to the structure of an initiation rite.³² More recently, Girardot has drawn the connection between the two by showing that “the narrative form of a fairy tale as a particular structural constellation of symbols basically reveals an initiatory pattern.”³³ Therefore, since the David and Goliath story likely has a folkloric or fairy tale background, an exegesis informed by the rites-of-passage/initiation pattern should prove illuminating.

Given the reasons enumerated above, it is entirely appropriate to apply a rite-of-passage interpretive lens to the tale of David and Goliath. Doing so reveals that the

Wright, “Homeric and Ancient Near Eastern Intertextuality in 1 Samuel 17,” *JBL* 130 [2011]: 451-71). Zorn challenges claims that Goliath’s armor is modeled on that of a Greek hoplite (as Finkelstein and Silberman argue; *David and Solomon*, 197) by proving that the giant’s armor resembles that of an Iron age Philistine chariot warrior (Jeffrey Zorn, “Reconsidering Goliath: An Iron Age I Philistine Chariot Warrior,” *BASOR* 360 [2010]: 1-22). Garsiel also presents a number of convincing arguments for the early date of the tale, including the observation that since Gath was destroyed in the late ninth century B.C.E., it would be unlikely for a later tale to claim that Goliath hailed from this city (Moshe Garsiel, “The Valley of Elah Battle and the Duel of David with Goliath: Between History and Artistic Theological Historiography,” in *Homeland and Exile: Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Honour of Bustenay Oded* [ed. Gershon Galil, Mark Geller, and Alan Millard; VTSup 130; Leiden: Brill, 2009], 404-10).

³¹ Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality* (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1968), 202.

³² Propp, *Morphology*, 114.

³³ N. J. Girardot, “Initiation and Meaning in the Tale of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs,” *Journal of American Folklore* 90 (1977): 275.

story's structure follows exactly the tripartite structure of a rite of passage (separation, liminality, and reincorporation).

The separation phase of a rite of passage, as the name indicates, physically separates the individual undergoing the rite (henceforth "the initiate") from his or her community, placing him or her into a marginal social and geographical space. In 1 Sam 17, the separation that David experiences pushes him progressively outward from more to less familiar and intimate circles. Specifically in this case, he first leaves his father (v. 20), then his brothers (v. 28), and finally is separated from his countrymen as he enters the valley of Elah to fight Goliath (v. 40).

After David's initial separation, the narrative continues to follow the typical tripartite structure of a rite of passage by having David enter a liminal phase. As discussed in chapter 1, initiates in this liminal period are defined as being "betwixt and between" two different social positions,³⁴ and are typically located in marginal geographical space for the duration of this phase of the rite.³⁵ Furthermore, it is often during this liminal period that initiates endure the trying physical ordeals typically

³⁴ See Turner, *Ritual Process*, 95.

³⁵ According to Anttonen ("Rites," 178), among van Gennep's unique insights is that "movement in social space is accompanied and identified with movement in territorial space." Thus, an initiate's movement through a rite of passage is not merely a psychological journey, but involves actual bodily movement to accompany the phases of separation, liminality, and reincorporation.

associated with maturation rites. Several features of the scene in which David and Goliath meet in battle (vv. 40-54) identify this moment as the liminal stage of David's narrative rite of passage. The battleground on which David and Goliath duel represents liminal space because it—like all battlefields—is located on land *between* two military encampments.³⁶ The valley of Elah, however, is recognizable as a liminal space for more than just this reason. Not only does the site of David's duel with Goliath fall between the Israelite and Philistine camps, but Elah itself was "an essential buffer zone lying between the heartland of Judah and the heartland of Philistia."³⁷ Furthermore, the duel is in a valley, a middle ground between the two hills on which the rival armies are encamped. Thus, the site of the duel can be identified as liminal ground on three levels: tactical (being the ground between the two armies); political (as a border between two states), and topographical (falling between two hills). A narrator would be hard-pressed to find a more quintessentially liminal space on which to set the middle phase of David's rite of passage.

Given the liminal imagery associated with the battleground on which David and Goliath fight, the meaning of the curious title applied to Goliath in 1 Sam 17:4 and 17:23

³⁶ van Gennep, *Rites*, 18.

³⁷ John A. Beck, "David and Goliath, A Story of Place: The Narrative-Geographical Shaping of 1 Samuel 17," *WTJ* 68 (2006): 326.

takes on special significance. In these verses the narrator refers to Goliath as an **אִישׁ הַבֵּינִים**, literally, “a man of the in-between-two.”³⁸ This appellation appears nowhere else in the HB, and its precise meaning has long eluded scholars. Regardless of whether the term ultimately connotes a “champion” who fights between two rival army lines, a “skirmisher,” or a chariot warrior—three suggestions scholars have proposed to define the term more specifically—the designation draws attention to the theme of liminality.³⁹ Goliath is a “man of the in-between,” or perhaps better a “man of the liminal space.” In other words, he embodies this phase of David’s rite of passage. Fighting and defeating the man of liminal space represents narratively the ordeals that so often must be overcome by initiates in coming-of-age rites.⁴⁰

³⁸ Following de Vaux, who understands **הַבֵּינִים** to be the preposition **בֵּין** with a dual ending (Roland de Vaux, “Single Combat in the Old Testament,” in *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* [trans. Damian McHugh; ed. Roland de Vaux; Garden City, N.Y.:1971], 124).

³⁹ For the argument that the term denotes a “champion,” see de Vaux (ibid., 124). Zorn claims that the term refers to a chariot warrior (Zorn, “Reconsidering,” 1-22). Using comparative evidence from Qumran, both Frolov and Wright (“Intertextuality,” 460 n. 36) and McCarter argue that the proper understanding of the term is “skirmisher” (P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *I Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary* [AB 8; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1980], 291).

⁴⁰ Turner shows that during the liminal phase the typical conventions and norms of the initiate’s society are often reversed, thus making the liminal phase a “world turned upside down” (see Turner, *Ritual Process*, 96-97). Vidal-Naquet’s discussion of the liminality of boys in ancient Greece during their maturation rites stresses how this aspect of liminality was often actualized by the explicit overturning of the typical military rules of conduct and engagement. The Greek ephebes (initiator boys) represented an “anti-hoplite” ethos, fighting contrary to the hoplite’s warrior code (Pierre Vidal-Naquet, “The Black Hunter and the Origin of the Athenian Ephebia,” in *The Black Hunter: Forms of Thought and Forms of Society in the Greek World* [trans. A. Szegedy-Maszak; Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986], 120). In a similar way, David’s

After stepping into the liminal space of the Elah valley and overcoming this liminal ordeal, symbolized by the “man of the liminal space” (i.e., Goliath), David completes his rite of passage signifying his masculine maturation via his reincorporation into his community. This reincorporation begins when David returns to the leaders of the “men of Israel,” Saul and Abner (v. 57). David’s full reincorporation into his society, now as a young man (עָלָם) instead of a boy, comes in 1 Sam 18:6-9, which functions as the natural conclusion to the David and Goliath narrative. Here David, returning from his battle with Goliath (v. 6), is greeted by the women of his people with songs lauding his martial prowess (v. 7). Such lavish public praise for the successful initiate is a very common feature of the reincorporation phase of a rite of passage; and indeed initiates in male puberty rites are frequently greeted at the rite’s conclusion by the women of their society—from whom they have been separated during the ritual.⁴¹ Therefore, the

unorthodox choice of weapons and his somewhat underhanded targeting of Goliath’s groin should perhaps be understood in light of the typical convention-reversal common to the liminal phase of a rite of passage.

⁴¹ Male puberty rites, as discussed previously (see chapter 1, 21, 42), require the separation of the boy from the feminine space of the home. These rites end, however, with the boy’s return to that same space, now as a man. See, e.g., Piot, *Remotely Global*, 80-82. For a discussion of the celebrations common to the conclusion of rites of passage, see Weisfield, “Puberty Rites,” 38-39. See also Claude Calame, *Choruses of Young Women in Ancient Greece: Their Morphology, Religious Role and Social Functions* (trans. D. Collins and J. Orion; Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), 13.

celebration of David by the women of Israel at the conclusion of his coming-of-age story is fitting.

In sum, the narrative of David and Goliath in 1 Sam 17-18:9 exactly follows the tripartite structure of a rite of passage. The initiate David experiences in perfect sequence a period of separation from his people, a liminal stage on marginal ground where an ordeal must be endured successfully, and a reincorporation phase where the initiate is welcomed back into his community and celebrated.

While identifying the presence of a narrativized rite of passage is important, it is not an end in itself. More important for my exegesis is the recognition that the presence of a rite-of-passage structure in this narrative advances the case for viewing 1 Sam 17-18:9 as a coming-of-age tale. As clarified in chapter 1, the presence of a rite-of-passage schema in a narrative does not offer conclusive evidence for the coming-of-age theme; however, it is *suggestive* of it.⁴² Therefore, considered alongside the other evidence for considering 1 Sam 17 a coming-of-age story, the presence of the tripartite rite-of-passage schema makes this case even more forcefully.

⁴² See the discussion of this point in chapter 1, 30-33.

3.1.3 Summary

In this section I have argued that 1 Sam 17 explicitly highlights the coming-of-age theme and employs the structure of a rite of passage to achieve this purpose.

Specifically, I have shown how the story's terminology marks David's initial boyish characterization, and that his display of bellicose strength and his defense of honor mark his newly minted masculinity. I have further suggested that the marriage he secures through his victory over Goliath (whether his actual marriage to Michal or his metaphorical marriage to Jonathan) represents the final act in his masculine maturation. Finally, I demonstrated how all three phases of a rite of passage are present in the narrative, and how this strongly supports a coming-of-age reading.

In conclusion, it is also important to note that the contours of the coming-of-age theme articulated here point to the understanding of masculinity that informs and underlies this narrative. The kind of man that David becomes and the way he attains that manhood illustrates what the narrator views to be characteristic of men.⁴³ A proper man can utilize violence effectively, especially on the battlefield. He also defends his and

⁴³ Again, it can be argued without reservation that this view of manhood represents "hegemonic masculinity:" that form of manhood popular among the elite men that wrote and canonized this story. However, it is possible that given the folkloric roots of 1 Sam 17, and Hamilton's argument that the biblical king's masculinity is a reflection of the normative masculinity throughout ancient Israel (see above, 160 n. 1), this story may provide a unique glimpse into the form of masculinity practiced by the majority of ancient Israelite men.

his nation's honor by not allowing an insult to his people to go unpunished. Marriage also is an important part of his identity as a man. Finally, his manhood is an achievement that he has proactively attained, not something that is simply given to him.

3.2 Excursus: Text Criticism of 1 Samuel 17

Before turning to the next story of royal coming-of-age—that of Solomon in 1 Kgs 1-3—it is important to address the notoriously complicated text-critical issues associated with the MT of 1 Sam 17.⁴⁴ These issues include the apparent contradictions and repetitions of the MT—e.g., the two introductions of Goliath in v. 14 and v. 23; the report in v. 50 that “no sword” was in David’s hand when he slew Goliath, which is immediately contradicted in the next verse where David decapitates the giant with a sword; and the fact that Saul does not appear to know David at the conclusion of the chapter (vv. 55-58), despite meeting him on at least two prior occasions (16:18-23; 17:32-39). While these issues are significant, the most vexing text critical problem is that large sections of 1 Sam 17 in the MT are absent from the Old Greek text of the Septuagint Vaticanus (henceforth LXXB), which corresponds only to the MT’s 1 Sam 17:1-11, 32-40,

⁴⁴ I use the abbreviation MT as shorthand designating the text tradition that served as the textual predecessor to the much later (ninth century C.E.) Masoretic Text.

42-48a, 49, 51-54. Almost half of the MT text (1 Sam 17:12-31, 41, 48b, 50, 55-58), therefore, has no equivalence in the LXXB.⁴⁵

Text critics have offered a number of detailed arguments to explain the development of the MT and LXXB texts of the David and Goliath tale, with new studies of the issue regularly appearing.⁴⁶ In spite of the large number of possible solutions to the text critical problems of 1 Sam 17, most solutions fall into one of four broad categories.⁴⁷ I will briefly outline these four categories below in order to demonstrate that regardless of which strategy a scholar uses to analyze the textual critical issues in 1 Sam 17, the coming-of-age theme in the story of David and Goliath remains evident.

The first explanation in the text critical debate holds that the MT is a compositional unity. According to this position, the contradictions and repetitions within the MT are the result of the tale's oral/folkloric background — such repetition and

⁴⁵ Evidence from the Qumran Samuel scroll (4QSam^a) has typically not been considered in this debate because it is fragmentary throughout 1 Sam 17-18 and the extant fragments seem to support MT at some points and LXXB at others. Recently Benjamin J. A. Johnson ("Reconsidering 4QSam^a and the Textual Support for the Long and Short Versions of the David and Goliath story," *VT* 62 [2012]) has argued that 4QSam^a "likely contained the longer version as found in MT" (ibid., 538) although it remains a "*codex mixtus*" (ibid., 548) containing elements of both traditions.

⁴⁶ For an extensive discussion of the contours of this debate, see most recently John Van Seters, *The Biblical Saga of King David* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 137-157.

⁴⁷ Of course, minor divergences are found between the scholarly works grouped together under these categories. My purpose, however, is not to discuss at length the intricacies of this debate but instead to show that most positions in the discussion are amenable to the coming-of-age reading I have offered above.

apparent inconsistency being common in orally-composed and transmitted tales.⁴⁸

Alternatively, some scholars in this group argue that the contradictions within the tale can in fact be reconciled through an attentive close reading of the text.⁴⁹ Scholars that support the compositional unity of the MT believe that the LXXB represents a later abridgment of the originally longer text by a translator who did not recognize the story's overall unity and therefore sought to remove what he thought were inconsistencies.

The second position also considers the LXXB to be an abridgment of the MT that attempted to eliminate what were perceived to be its contradictions. This harmonizing edit could have been the work of the Greek translator of the LXXB or that of the Hebrew editor who created the *Vorlage* for the LXXB. However, this position differs from the first in arguing that the MT was not a compositional unity to begin with but was a combination of at least two disparate sources that lacked significant inconsistencies before their combination. The LXXB translator, attempting to reconcile the MT's

⁴⁸ See Jason, "Folk Epic," 37-40.

⁴⁹ See Robert Polzin (*Samuel and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History. Part Two: 1 Samuel* [Bloomington, Ind.: University of Indiana Press, 1993], 172-74) and Fokkelman (*Narrative Art Vol.2*, 143-208), both of whom argue that the text only *appears* to have contradictions.

inconsistencies, produced a translation that roughly corresponds to one of the original internally consistent sources of the MT text.⁵⁰

The third explanation represents the majority position. It holds that the LXXB was not a harmonizing emendation but faithfully translated the story that existed at the time. A second version of the story (corresponding to the MT's vv. 12-31, 41, 48b, 50, 55-58—the so-called “non-LXXB”), whose provenance was from a source unknown to the LXXB translator, was later added to the first story to form the current MT version.⁵¹

Finally, a few scholars claim that the MT text was created as a result of the addition of a theological layer onto an older popular folk tale about David's defeat of the Philistine giant. This theological revision is responsible for portions of the text like David's “mini-homily” in vv. 45-47, where he declares his faith in Yhwh and affirms that Yhwh will grant him victory. This theologically revised version of the story corresponds to the current MT and was the basis of the LXXB translation. However, the translator

⁵⁰ Scholars that hold this position include: Dominique Barthélemy (“Trois Niveaux d'Analyse,” in Barthélemy et al., *The Story of David and Goliath*, 47-54); Stephen Pisano (*Additions or Omissions in the Books of Samuel* [OBO 57; Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1984], 83-86); and D. W. Gooding (“An Approach to the Literary and Textual Problems in the David-Goliath Story,” in Barthélemy et al., *The Story of David and Goliath*, 55-86).

⁵¹ See, e.g., McCarter (*I Samuel*, 298; 306-9); Emmanuel Tov (“The Nature of the Differences between MT and the LXX,” in Barthélemy et al., *The Story of David and Goliath*, 19-46); McKenzie (*Biography*, 73); and Lust (“Story,” 5-18).

abridged it in order to iron out perceived inconsistencies that apparently did not trouble the earlier “theological editor” of the Hebrew text.⁵²

Although these four explanations differ significantly, each is amenable to my claim of the centrality of the coming-of-age theme to 1 Sam 17. On the one hand, the first position—which sees the MT as a compositional unity—does not challenge my interpretation of 1 Sam 17, since my exegesis is also based on a reading of the MT as a unity. Similarly, the fourth position presents no obstacle to my claim that the original story was concerned primarily with David’s coming-of-age, since few, if any, of my conclusions are derived from theologically infused verses (e.g., vv. 45-47).⁵³ Instead, my argument is constructed primarily from portions of the narrative without a heavy theological bent, which scholars of this view would likely attribute to the original folktale behind the text. In short, the coming-of-age theme’s presence is not seriously undermined by either the first or fourth explanation.

The situation is more complex with the second and third explanations. Because my case for the coming-of-age theme is based on the MT, positions like these that split

⁵² See Rofé (“Battle,” 117-51) and Van Seters (*Saga*, 154-62).

⁵³ The possible exception being my remarks on the defense-of-honor motif, which may overlap with the proposed “theological edit” of the text, given that much of the indignity at Goliath’s insult stems from the Philistine having reproached “the armies of the living God” (v. 26, 36). Furthermore, David’s statement of faith in Yhwh in v. 45, which would belong to this theological stratum, also mentions Goliath’s shaming insult against Israel and its god.

the MT into two separate sources—the LXXB and non-LXXB—appear to weaken my thesis. This, however, is not the case. Even when the text is separated into two purported sources (i.e., LXXB and non-LXXB) *both* tales still contain coming-of-age themes, albeit with slight differences in emphasis. Both sources, for instance, depict David in 1 Sam 17 as a youth. In LXXB Saul warns David that because he is a נער he is unfit to fight Goliath (v. 33). Here too David is unaccustomed to a warrior’s armor and weapons (vv. 38-40). Similarly, Goliath is said to disdain David because he is a boy (נער) who was ruddy and handsome (v. 42)—descriptors that I have shown to be characteristic of youth. In non-LXXB David is also described as a youth. Here the reader is told that only the three eldest of David’s seven brothers are in the army (v. 13), which makes David appear quite young. This source also contains Eliab’s belittling rebuke of David (v. 28)—a derogative that suggests David’s youth.

Both the LXXB and non-LXXB sources follow the same plot line of a young hero performing the quintessentially masculine act of defeating an enemy on the battlefield.⁵⁴ They also stress the importance of David’s defeat of Goliath as a defense of the honor of Israel (LXXB: vv. 10, 36, 45; non-LXXB: vv. 25, 26), reflecting another important feature of biblical masculinity. Given that David’s public demonstration of his masculinity

⁵⁴ The LXXB, however, does put more emphasis on the emasculation of the Philistine (vv. 49, 50).

through victory in battle and the defense of Israel's honor — two signs of his transition to manhood — are found in LXXB and non-LXXB, the coming-of-age theme is evident in both sources.

Finally, both stories incorporate the tripartite structure of a rite of passage. In LXXB David separates from the men of his people (v. 40) to enter the liminal space in the valley to face the “man of the space between” (v. 4), and is reincorporated into his community with celebration and songs (1 Sam 18:6b). In non-LXXB David separates from his father (v. 20), brothers (v. 30), and countrymen (v. 48b); meets the “man of the space between” (v. 23) and defeats him in the liminal stage; and is reincorporated into the community of his fellow men, represented by Saul and Abner (vv. 57-59).

Nevertheless, two features of the coming-of-age theme are unique to the LXXB. The first is the theme of marriage (i.e., the betrothal to Saul's daughter [v. 25] and the possibly metaphorical marriage to Jonathan in 18:1-4). Second, only in the LXXB does Saul recognize David's maturation — referring to him at the end of the story as an עלם. These two variations strengthen the connection of this story to the coming-of-age theme, suggesting that this theme is more clearly articulated in the non-LXXB.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Still, as I have previously demonstrated, the theme also is readily evident in the LXXB.

Thus, even when 1 Sam 17-18:9 is viewed as a combination of two sources, the importance of the coming-of-age theme is still apparent, being found in both sources. There remains, however, one more significant challenge which comes to light when considering the relationship between 1 Sam 17-18:9 and the text that immediately precedes it: 1 Sam 16:14-23. This textual block, which is included in the LXXB, reports how Saul's servants introduced David to the king as one who could soothe his troubled spirit with music. In his description of David in v. 18, Saul's servant calls David both a "mighty man of valor" and a "man of war." Such terminology would obviously not be used in reference to a boy. Some scholars argue, therefore, that the depiction of David in 1 Sam 17 cannot be a youthful one, given that he has already been introduced as a man in 1 Sam 16:14-23.⁵⁶ A variant of this argument claims that since 16:14-23 is found in the LXXB, this source depicts David as a man throughout 1 Sam 17 as well, but the non-LXXB differs on this by viewing David as a youth in his duel with Goliath.⁵⁷

I have already addressed much of this critique above (see pp. 163-66). Still, it is important to emphasize again that *even in the LXXB text of 1 Sam 17*, despite evidence to the contrary (i.e., 1 Sam 16:14-23), David is clearly depicted as a youth. It is this source

⁵⁶ See above, 162-63.

⁵⁷ See, e.g., DeVries ("Victory," 30-33), Lust ("Story," 11-14), Ackerman (*When Heroes Love*, 201) and McCarter (*I Samuel*, 296, 307-8).

that reports that David had to convince Saul to be allowed to face Goliath over Saul's objection that as a נָעַר David is unfit to do so (vv. 33-37).⁵⁸ Furthermore, in the LXXB David makes his case for his suitability for the duel by describing his success when fighting animals and saying that is unaccustomed to the typical armor and weapons of a warrior (vv. 34-39). Finally, David's beauty and complexion are emphasized in this source (v. 42), both of which are markers of youthfulness. David's depiction in the LXXB of 1 Sam 17, therefore, differs significantly from that of the mighty man of war described in 1 Sam 16:14-23.

At least two solutions can explain this discrepancy between 1 Sam 16:14-23 and what follows in 1 Sam 17. Given the tangle of sources and numerous internal inconsistencies throughout 1 Sam 16-18, it is possible that the report identifying David as a man to Saul in 16:14-23 comes from a source separate from the text of 1 Sam 17 (or its sources, if the MT is not a compositional unity). The argument for separate sources is supported by the fact that no irrefutable evidence proves 1 Sam 17 (and even the LXXB of 1 Sam 17) knows of or is dependent upon 16:14-23. Furthermore, the thematic plot points appearing in 16:14-23—such as the “evil spirit” tormenting Saul and David's

⁵⁸ It is important to note that even if נָעַר is understood as “squire” here, and not as a life-cycle term denoting youthfulness as I have argued, the contradiction with 1 Sam 16:14-23 is still glaring. A mighty man of valor/man of war is clearly a far cry from a lowly squire.

attempts to soothe the king with music—do not reappear until after the David and Goliath tale concludes.⁵⁹ In sum, the narrative in 1 Sam 17 in no way logically follows from 1 Sam 16:14-23, therefore suggesting that the two tales ultimately derive from separate sources.

Another solution emerges when considering the conclusion of 1 Sam 17 in the LXXB source—the same source to which 1 Sam 16:14-23 belongs. The concluding verse of the LXXB account of the duel scene between David and Goliath (v. 54) claims that after defeating the giant, David took his head to Jerusalem, an obvious anachronism given that Jerusalem would not fall to David's forces until 2 Sam 5. Campbell's explanation for why such a glaring mistake found its way into the text is illuminating. He believes that the mention of Jerusalem here serves as a conscious foreshadowing of what is to come, writing that

Perhaps rather than see David carrying the head [of Goliath] to Jerusalem, we should hear in this statement an awareness that it was victory over the Philistine that carried David to Jerusalem—and to kingship there.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ A possible exception to the claim that 1 Sam 17 is totally unaware of 1 Sam 16:14-23 is found in 17:15, which belongs to the non-LXXB. Most scholars, however, identify this verse (which tells how David would shuttle between his father's house in Bethlehem and Saul's army) as an awkward and late editorial addition. See McCarter, *I Samuel*, 303, 308 and Robert P. Gordon, *I & II Samuel: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1988), 65.

⁶⁰ Campbell, *1 Samuel*, 183.

Since the LXXB source contains one such foreshadowing anachronism in this report of David carrying Goliath's head to Jerusalem, it is plausible that it contains yet another in 16:18. The servant's identification of David here as a "mighty man of valor" and a "man of war" is certainly anachronistic when considering it in light of David's obvious youth in the following chapter; however, it may serve to herald David's military accomplishments that are the subject of later treatment in 1-2 Samuel.

In summary, despite the complicated text-critical issues in 1 Sam 17, my contention that the coming-of-age theme is central to the narrative remains intact. Each of the four most common scholarly explanations of the text's development are amenable to this thesis.

3.3 "Be Strong, and Become a Man:" Solomon's Coming-of-Age in 1 Kings 1-3

The next case study of royal coming-of-age to consider is that of David's son and heir, Solomon. Upon initial consideration, Solomon may seem a curious choice for such a study. A coming-of-age reading of a given biblical text requires that the character under consideration begin the story as a youth, yet Solomon is most frequently

associated with a quality characteristic of adult manhood in the HB: wisdom.⁶¹ One would therefore not expect a character defined by this quality ever to appear boyish and immature.⁶²

However, a closer look at the earliest interpretations and retellings of the Solomon story in 1 Kgs 1-11 reveals that alongside the common characterization of Solomon as wise, early readers of this story also frequently highlight Solomon's youth at the time of his accession to the throne. For instance, on two occasions in 1-2 Chronicles—the earliest extant retelling of the Solomon story—David stresses Solomon's youth by referring to him as נָעָר וְרָךְ ("young and inexperienced"; 1 Chr 22:5; 29:1).⁶³ The first century Jewish historian Josephus is even more specific in describing Solomon's youth. In *Ant.* 8.211 he reckons Solomon's age to be only fourteen when he takes over the kingship after the death of David, which causes his subjects initially to mock him as a mere boy (μειράκιον; 8.32) until they witnessed his precocious wisdom first hand.

⁶¹ This quality, of course, is also associated with women in the HB. See chapter 2, 78.

⁶² Indeed, Lasine recently has argued that Solomon is quite exceptional among important biblical figures in that the text provides no information about his formative childhood years (Stuart Lasine, *Knowing Kings: Knowledge, Power and Narcissism in the Hebrew Bible* [SemeiaSt 40; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001], 133). I will challenge Lasine on this point below.

⁶³ In both instances where David refers to Solomon in this way, it is to persuade the people to assist Solomon in the daunting task of building the Jerusalem temple. Given the context, then, it is most likely that the multivalent term נָעָר is employed to emphasize Solomon's youthfulness. Most modern translations agree with this assessment (see NRSV, NAS, NJPS of 1 Chr 22:5; 29:1).

Similarly, other ancient rabbinic sources put Solomon's age at twelve or thirteen when he began to rule as king.⁶⁴

These indications of a "youth theme" in the Solomon narrative of 1 Kgs 1-11 do not simply appear *de novo* in these early retellings and interpretations; they appear in the source text itself, which contains several references to Solomon's boyishness. I will begin my analysis below by identifying these indications of Solomon's youth in 1 Kgs 1-3. This effort will then be used to support my larger thesis that the early episodes of the Solomon narrative highlight the king's youth in order to draw attention to the coming-of-age theme in 1 Kgs 1-3. Ultimately, I will argue that David's dying wish for Solomon to "be strong, and become a man" ⁶⁵ in 1 Kgs 2:2 articulates the crucial theme in the surrounding narrative. In this text, the reader is provided with an informative glimpse into what the text and the culture that produced it understood as necessary in accomplishing the transition from an "inexperienced" נָעָר (to use the Chronicler's term) to a man.

However, the answer to the question of what makes a boy a man in these chapters is by no means settled. Indeed, two different views of how one becomes a man,

⁶⁴ According to *S. 'Olam Rab.* 14, Solomon was twelve at his accession. For other rabbinic sources suggesting that Solomon was thirteen at this time, see Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1928), 6.277 n. 1.

⁶⁵ Translation mine.

and by extension, what characteristics most define a man, seem to be at odds in this text. These two contrasting views of manhood and how one becomes a man in 1 Kgs 1-3 do not intertwine in these chapters, requiring minute and tedious analyses to tease out which view is predominant in which verse. Instead, the two views of coming-of-age are each associated with one of the two large textual units within these three chapters. One is found in 1 Kgs 1-2, which details the political machinations and violent purges that put Solomon on the throne. The other is set forth in 1 Kgs 3:1-15, the scene of Yhwh's dream revelation to Solomon at Gibeon.

Significantly, the separation of 1 Kgs 1-3 into two units reflects a long-standing scholarly practice that understands 1 Kgs 1-2 and 3:1-15 as originating from different sources. This source-critical division was first made by Rost, who proposed in the 1920s that 1 Kgs 1-2 provided the conclusion of the so-called Succession Narrative, a composition that runs through 2 Samuel (beginning in 2 Sam 9) and that is concerned thematically with the question of who will succeed David.⁶⁶ While scholars in recent decades have challenged elements of Rost's theory, the belief that the dream narrative of

⁶⁶ Leonhard Rost, *Die Überlieferung von der Thronnachfolge Davids* (BWANT 3/6; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1926). For a recent discussion of the *status quaestionis* of Rost's proposed Succession Narrative, see John Barton, "Dating the 'Succession Narrative,'" in *In Search of Pre-exilic Israel* (ed. John Day; JSOTSup 406; New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 95-106.

1 Kgs 3 originally existed as a story deriving from a different traditional or historical source than that behind 1 Kgs 1-2 still dominates.⁶⁷

Even though there is a consensus regarding the bifurcation of 1 Kgs 1-3 based on source criticism, no one as yet has investigated this narrative in light of the divergent views of masculinity and coming-of-age found in the two blocks of text. Such an investigation is offered below. I will consider each textual unit separately, first identifying the presence of youthful imagery in the depiction of Solomon in the beginning of both narratives. I will then demonstrate how both stories depict Solomon's transition out of boyishness—a transition that happens quite differently in the respective stories. Finally, I will contrast the coming-of-age themes in these two parallel narrations of Solomon's masculine development, and will compare them to David's coming of age story in 1 Sam 17. In so doing, I will demonstrate how the coming-of-age theme highlights thematic shifts in Israel's historical narrative and perhaps can be used to track the diachronic development of biblical masculinity.

⁶⁷ See Mordechai Cogan, *1 Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 10; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 190. See also Burke Long, *1 Kings: With an Introduction to Historical Literature* (FOTL 9; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1984), 66; Jean-Marie Husser, *Dreams and Dream Narratives in the Biblical World* (trans. J. Munro; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 124-28; David McLain Carr, "Royal Ideology and the Technology of Faith: A Comparative Midrash Study of 1 Kgs 3:2-15" (PhD diss., The Claremont Graduate School, 1988), 140-77.

3.3.1 Solomon's Coming-of-Age in 1 Kgs 1-2

3.3.1.1 Solomon's youth

Establishing the immaturity of a character is essential to a coming-of-age narrative, otherwise the readers have no foil against which to gauge how the character matures as the story unfolds. Therefore, identifying the coming-of-age motif in 1 Kgs 1-2 begins with the ways that the narrative *initially* emphasizes Solomon's youth. His youthfulness is first indicated by his passivity throughout 1 Kgs 1. Significantly, even though the chapter is largely devoted to the story of how Solomon, rather than his older and better-credentialed brother Adonijah, becomes David's successor, Solomon hardly speaks or acts independently in 1 Kgs 1.⁶⁸ His passivity stands in strong contrast to the whirl of activity in which practically everyone else in the chapter seems caught. For instance, Bathsheba and Nathan's court intrigues to ensure Solomon's succession are described in great detail, as is Adonijah's feast with his supporters and his subsequent retreat seeking sanctuary once informed of his younger brother's coronation. Meanwhile, from the narrator's perspective, Solomon remains passive and takes no

⁶⁸ Others have noticed Solomon's strange lack of involvement in the events of this chapter. For example, Walsh notes that throughout 1 Kgs 1, Solomon is "utterly passive," adding that he is "the subject of no verbs, the speaker of no words, [and] the performer of no actions" (Jerome T. Walsh, "The Characterization of Solomon in First Kings 1-5," *CBQ* 57 [1995]: 474). Long similarly describes Solomon here as "something of a shadow, pictured only in what people do for and to him" (*I Kings*, 38).

active part in any of this action. Indeed, as a character he is consistently the one *acted upon*, not the actor. Throughout 1 Kgs 1:10-37, where his fate as future king is decided, he is completely absent from the action, and is only spoken about in the third person by others. Moreover, when he finally does appear in the story (1 Kgs 1:38-40, 51-53), it is primarily as the object of verbs. He is made to ride David's mule (וַיִּרְכָּבוּ אֶת־שְׁלֹמֹה) and is led by others to Gihon (וַיֵּלְכוּ אִתּוֹ) in v. 38; he is anointed by Tsadok (וַיִּמָּשַׁח אֶת־שְׁלֹמֹה) and acclaimed by "all the people" (כָּל־הָעָם) in v. 39; David is said to have "made him king" (הִמְלִיךְ אֶת־שְׁלֹמֹה) in v. 43; and he "is informed" (וַיִּגַּד לְשְׁלֹמֹה) about the actions of his brother in v. 51.

In displaying such passivity in the face of events with tremendous impact on his life, Solomon exhibits a characteristic common to the description of children in the HB. As seen in chapter 2, children are routinely portrayed as powerless to act on their own behalf, both in terms of their physical weakness and their lack of social power, or "influence."⁶⁹ Simply put, an ancient audience would recognize passivity and powerlessness as characteristic of the common portrayal of children. For Solomon to be consistently depicted as one acted upon in 1 Kgs 1, but not a potent actor, therefore suggests that he is a youth.

⁶⁹ See chapter 2, 110-13, 123-24, 129-30, 133, 134, 138-39.

However, Solomon's inactivity in 1 Kgs 1-2 is not the only indicator of his youth. Another characteristic feature of children in the HB is their close association with women, particularly their mothers. For example, Isa 49:15 and Ps 131:2 rely on the intimate relationship between mother and child to symbolize peace, comfort, and compassion. Psychological data similarly demonstrate the ubiquity of this connection across cultures, as discussed in chapter 1.⁷⁰

Solomon, in particular, strongly exhibits a close connection with his mother Bathsheba throughout 1 Kgs 1 and the first half of 1 Kgs 2. First, she is a major player in the machinations that bring him to power in 1 Kgs 1. Moreover, in 1 Kgs 2 everyone in the text (namely Adonijah, Bathsheba, and Solomon himself) assumes that Solomon would never refuse a request made by his mother—yet another indication of the strength of their bond. Similarly, Bathsheba occupies the position of honor in the royal court at her son the king's right hand.⁷¹ Even more significant is the report in 1 Kgs 2:19 that when Bathsheba came before Solomon to make a request on behalf of Adonijah, Solomon bowed down to her. The verb employed to describe this act is the *Hishtaphel* verb חוה, which always describes an act of proper respect or worship due to one's superior, whether human or divine (see, for example, Bathsheba's own obeisance to

⁷⁰ See chapter 1, 15-17.

⁷¹ For the right hand of the king as the position of honor, see Ps 45:9 (MT 45:10); 110:1.

King David in 1 Kgs 1:16).⁷² Most importantly, this verb—which occurs 170 times in the HB—is never elsewhere used to describe a man bowing and doing obeisance before a woman.⁷³ Certainly, a level of respect and intimacy is to be expected between a mother and son in any culture. Still, what is on display in 1 Kgs 1-2 is a unique example of extraordinary closeness between Bathsheba and Solomon. Since the close bond between children and mothers in the biblical text has been established above, these data describing Solomon’s deferential and dependent relationship with Bathsheba contribute to the text’s portrayal of the king, until this point in the narrative, as still very much a boy.

The evidence for Solomon’s youth in 1 Kgs 1-2 is nowhere more obvious, however, than in the dying David’s final words of counsel to his son that he “be strong, and become a man” (וְהָיָה אִישׁ וְהָיָה אִישׁ; 1 Kgs 2:2).⁷⁴ Some translations, like NRSV, render David’s words here “be strong, be courageous”; however this represents an indefensible alteration of the literal sense of the Hebrew. David literally tells Solomon to “be strong,

⁷² According to Preuss, when the root חוה is used in a secular context, it indicates “respect” and “honor” for the person towards whom the gesture is directed and serves as a way to acknowledge one of “higher rank” (Horst Dietrich Preuss, “חוה,” *TDOT* 4: 251).

⁷³ The exceptional nature of this act possibly explains why the LXX here translates that Solomon did not bow to his mother but instead “kissed her” (καταφίλησεν αὐτήν).

⁷⁴ Translation mine.

and *become* a man.”⁷⁵ Of special importance here is the use of the verb *היה* with the preposition *לְ*. According to Koehler and Baumgartner, the force of the construction is not “to be,” but instead “to become.”⁷⁶ The implication is that David believes that Solomon at this point in the narrative is not yet a man, but that he must become one in order to rule the kingdom after his father’s death.⁷⁷ When David’s directive to his son to “become a man” is combined with Solomon’s passivity in the early parts of the narrative

⁷⁵ Sweeney’s translation (“you must be strong and be a man”) is closer to mine, and therefore differs from NRSV (Marvin Sweeney, *I & II Kings: A Commentary* [OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007], 51). See also the translations by Cogan (“be strong and be a man!” [*I Kings*, 5]) and Jerome T. Walsh (“Be strong! Be a man!”, *I Kings* [Berit Olam; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1996], 39)).

⁷⁶ L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, J. J. Stamm, “*היה*,” *HALOT* 1: 244. *HALOT* offers 1 Kgs 2:2 as its parade example of this meaning. Other cited examples include Gen 2:7 — where the human becomes a living being (*נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה*) after Yhwh breaths into its nostrils — and Num 10:31, where Hobab is asked to become Israel’s eyes in the wilderness.

⁷⁷ A potential objection to this reading can be raised by noticing that David’s encouragement to Solomon echoes the rallying cry of the Philistines in 1 Sam 4:9: “Be strong, and be men, O Philistines!” (*הִתְחַזְקוּ וְהִיֹּאֲזִימוּ*). Surely, here the Philistine army is not identifying itself literally as boys who need to mature to battle the Israelites. The use here is apparently a figure of speech meaning “act like men,” spoken in response to the unmanly fear that had taken hold of the Philistines. In this view, then, *contra HALOT*, the use of the construction in 1 Kgs 2:2 also may mean more “to act like a man” than “to become a man.”

While this reading is just as defensible as that proposed by *HALOT*, which I have followed above, the consequences of accepting it as an alternative are relatively minor for my argument. No matter which reading one prefers, it is clear that David does not believe that Solomon is currently acting like a man. Therefore, the advice David gives in his final testament to Solomon enumerates how his son can begin to enact his masculinity. Furthermore, if David’s exhortation is understood as “act like a man” instead of “become a man,” one wonders how Solomon’s previous actions are viewed as less than manly and in need of change in David’s eyes. The simplest answer to this question begins by recognizing the prevalence of youthful imagery in the description of Solomon in the preceding chapter. David’s demand that his son act like a man is most likely given in light of Solomon’s previous immature behavior — indeed no other answer to this query is readily apparent. Thus, even if the alternative reading is accepted, David’s command that Solomon “act like a man” essentially means that he “stop acting like a child” as he had up to this point. The difference between the two readings, therefore, is relatively minor. Either David tells Solomon to “grow up” (*HALOT* reading) or to “act like a man (and stop acting like a boy)” (alternative reading).

and his close and dependent relationship with his mother, a detailed depiction of Solomon as a boy in the first half of 1 Kgs 1-2 emerges.

3.3.1.2 David's plan for Solomon's maturation

While Solomon is portrayed as a boy in the beginning of the narrative in 1 Kgs 1-2, this boyhood is left behind by the story's conclusion. The manner in which Solomon accomplishes his father's wish for him to become a man is described in the latter half of 1 Kgs 2. The path to manhood, however, is originally charted earlier in the chapter in David's last will and testament. His father's final decree functions to set out the precise steps that Solomon must take to mature into his manhood. The first step, according to David, is to "be strong" (יָחִזְקֶתָהּ; 1 Kgs 2:2)—the command that David places alongside his demand for Solomon to become a man. David's directive reflects the repeated connection between strength and manhood that is common to the HB. As demonstrated in chapter 2 and earlier in this chapter, manly strength is often reckoned as the effective use of violent force against enemies, especially on the battlefield.⁷⁸ Here too, it seems, David's understanding of "being strong" entails the efficacious use of violence. This connection is palpable in David's final instructions, as he outlines the bloody revenge

⁷⁸ See chapter 2, 61-67. Note, however, that the display of strength through physical and violent force is not to be equated with unbridled aggression or bloodlust but is instead to be controlled and only expressed in appropriate and limited ways (see chapter 2, 66-67, 80-82).

that Solomon is to take on those with whom David still has a score to settle—namely, Joab (David’s former army commander) and Shimei ben Gera. David’s message is clear: if you want to be a man, be strong; that is, be forceful and violent if necessary.

The next feature of masculinity that David’s dying words to Solomon emphasize is wisdom. Twice, in vv. 6 and 9, David refers to Solomon’s wisdom—the first time the term is associated with Solomon in the HB. As with the association of strength and masculinity, the relationship between wisdom and ideal biblical manhood is also well established, as Clines shows in his study of the David narratives.⁷⁹ However, the wisdom referred to here has what Fokkelman refers to as a “sinister undertone.”⁸⁰ Just like the strength that Solomon must show is associated with his commission to take vengeance on those whom his father has marked for death, so too is his wisdom viewed in relation to this vengeance. After describing Joab’s crimes to Solomon in v. 5, David tells Solomon in v. 6 to “act according to [his] wisdom” when dealing with the Joab. In case Solomon has not perceived David’s meaning clearly, he adds the ominous addendum “but do not let his gray head go down to Sheol in peace.” Similarly, in v. 9

⁷⁹ See chapter 2, 67-69.

⁸⁰ J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel: A Full Interpretation Based on Stylistic and Structural Analyses. Volume I: King David (II Sam. 9-20 & I Kings 1-2)* (SSN 20; Aasen/Maastricht, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1981), 389. Fokkelman also notices the “cynical ring” that is recognizable in the application of the term “wisdom” to the violent deeds Solomon is to perform (ibid.).

David appeals to Solomon's wisdom while again calling on him to bring Shimei ben Gera's "gray head down with blood to Sheol."⁸¹

The "wisdom" (חֲכָמָה) referenced here clearly seems more a political cunning or cleverness, and less the kind of judicial, engineering, or academic wisdom that is more often attributed to Solomon. Indeed, Müller compares this usage of wisdom with that of Jonadab in 2 Sam 13:3 or Pharaoh in Exod 1:10, both of whom use their "wisdom" to hatch Machiavellian or criminal schemes. Müller therefore defines this kind of חֲכָמָה as "skill" or "tactical ability of...[an] ambiguous nature."⁸² Alongside strength, therefore, David's understanding of what it takes for his heir to become a man includes "wisdom," or more accurately, "cleverness."

The other two requests that David makes of his son from his death bed are: (1) Solomon is to keep Yhwh's commandments and statutes as written in the Torah of Moses (v. 3); and (2) he is to deal favorably with the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite in recompense for the loyalty their father showed David during Absalom's rebellion (v. 7).

⁸¹ In fact, David here refers to Solomon as a "wise man" (אִישׁ חָכָם). In light of his earlier declaration in v. 2 that Solomon needs to become/act more like a man, David's use of the term אִישׁ here in reference to Solomon should be interpreted as either an affectionate title (as when a modern father refers to his young son as a "man"), a foreshadowing of the future (that is, "if you do these things, you will be a man"), or an attempt to stroke the ego of his boyish son by rhetorically elevating him to manhood.

⁸² H. P. Müller, "חֲכָמָה" TDOT 4: 373. Fokkelman similarly refers to the "wisdom" on display in 1 Kgs 2 as "practical and tactical intelligence, cleverness" (*Narrative Art Vol. 1*, 408), while Walsh (*I Kings*, 38) prefers the adjective "shrewd" to "wise" when describing Solomon's actions in this chapter. I have adopted Fokkelman's suggestion and use "cleverness" to translate חֲכָמָה in 1 Kgs 2.

The first of these requests is related to the manly value of self-control through obedience to Yhwh's laws, as discussed in chapter 2.⁸³ In Deuteronomy, this self-control ensures that a man will "have a name in Israel," thereby ensuring his memory and lineage (Deut 25:6, 7; 29:20 [MT 29:19]). The same motivation is attached to David's request in v. 4. David claims that if Solomon will obey Yhwh's precepts, then Yhwh would "establish the word that he spoke concerning [David]" (v. 4) and would guarantee that David's descendents would perpetually sit upon the throne of Israel. Therefore, the motivation for obeying Yhwh appears to be the solidifying of David's legacy through the perpetuation of his line, which of course also ensures Solomon's legacy.⁸⁴

The second request in v. 7 (that Solomon reward Barzillai's sons for their father's loyalty to David) concerns issues of honor, another significant feature of biblical masculinity.⁸⁵ David's reputation as an honorable and powerful man is at stake if Barzillai's loyalty goes unrewarded, hence his request that this oversight would be

⁸³ See chapter 2, 80-82.

⁸⁴ David's words of advice directing Solomon to follow Yhwh's statutes in v. 3, therefore, are not simply "Deuteronomistic platitudes," as Walsh argues (*I Kings*, 38; see also Alter, *David Story*, xiii). The motivation for Solomon's obedience of Yhwh are considerations of *realpolitik* and therefore fit with the practical and calculating tone of the remainder of David's deathbed speech. This does not completely discount the possibility that vv. 3-4 are additions by DtrH; indeed, David's request reflects the same desire to "have a name in Israel" so common in Deuteronomy. However, if they are additions, DtrH has effectively inserted his theological message in a way that respects and mimics the content of the surrounding speech. See also below, 235 n. 113.

⁸⁵ See chapter 2, 85-91.

corrected.⁸⁶ Maintaining his father David's honor is essential to Solomon, given that the defense of family honor is as important as one's individual honor.⁸⁷ For Solomon to follow his father's command to "become a man," therefore, he must be honorable, which requires protecting his father's reputation.

In summation, then, David's final instructions to Solomon disclose how the narrative in 1 Kgs 1-2 depicts the key components of "becoming a man." First, strength as evidenced by the adept use of violent force is essential. Second, a clever mind that displays strategic political acumen is necessary. Third, displaying self-control by obeying the statutes of Yhwh plays a significant role in this articulation of the tenets of manhood, although it seems that its ultimate motive is to further ensure the lineage of both David and Solomon. Finally, David's advice to Solomon shows that the need to defend family honor is incumbent on one who would "become a man."

⁸⁶ This request reflects the frequent connection between hospitality and honor noted by several scholars of the honor-shame system in Mediterranean cultures. See Gilmore, "Honor, Honesty, Shame," 101. See also Michael Herzfeld, "'As in Your Own House,'" 75-89. For a discussion of hospitality and its association with honor in ancient Israel, see T. R. Hobbs, "Hospitality in the First Testament and the 'Teleological Fallacy,'" JSOT 95 (2001): 3-30. Hobbs argues that too often in biblical studies the modern conceptions of hospitality centered on entertaining and feeding one's guests are projected upon the biblical texts. Ancient Israelite hospitality operated within a system of give-and-take, where failing to return a favor (like the loyalty shown by Barzillai to David) detracted from one's honor (see *ibid.*, 28-29).

⁸⁷ For the importance of defending the honor of one's kinsmen in an honor-shame system, see Zeid, "Honour and Shame among the Bedouins," 243-59.

3.3.1.3 Solomon becomes a man

Thus far, I have highlighted the ways that the text emphasizes Solomon's youth and identified the characteristics associated with manhood in 1 Kgs 1-2. My initial contention that 1 Kgs 1-2 should be read as coming-of-age narrative, however, is not established unless the boyish Solomon of 1 Kgs 1 and the opening verses of 1 Kgs 2 comes to embody those masculine characteristics outlined in David's farewell speech. The means by which Solomon fulfills his father's wish that he become a man is described in the remainder of 1 Kgs 2, following David's death in vv. 10-11. First, Solomon employs the violent strength his father recommended and has two of King David's foes, Joab and Shimei, executed.⁸⁸ In fact, Solomon goes even further when he disposes of a rival not on David's "hit list": his brother Adonijah, who Solomon feared was planning to usurp him. It is atypical that Solomon's acts of vengeance do not occur on the ideal stage for displaying bellicose manly strength (i.e., the battlefield) nor does Solomon himself bear the avenging sword in his own hand. However, the text is clear

⁸⁸ The frequency with which the verb פגע ("to strike") is used in 1 Kgs 2 (vv. 25, 29, 31, 32, 34, 46) indicates the emphasis on the violent use of force in this portion of the narrative. See Jung Ju Kang (*The Persuasive Portrayal of Solomon in 1 Kings 1-11* [Bern: Peter Lang, 2003], 138) and Walsh (*1 Kings*, 55), both of whom argue for פגע as the *Leitwort* of 1 Kgs 2.

that Solomon's orders are behind each of these acts, which in its own way constitutes an effective use of force.⁸⁹

Alongside his demonstration of the ability to exert violent strength, Solomon is shown demonstrating wisdom as that concept is understood in David's deathbed speech (i.e., tactical skill, cleverness, and political savvy). The young king discerns the potentially rebellious intentions of his older brother Adonijah that underpinned his seemingly innocuous request for marriage to David's former concubine Abishag—intentions, significantly, that Solomon's mother did not detect. More impressively, he carries out the vengeance killings of Shimei and Joab by having them both condemn themselves with their own words or actions. Shimei brings his blood on his own head by breaking an oath he made to Solomon never to leave the veritable house arrest that the king imposed on him in Jerusalem (v. 37). Joab, too speaks his own death sentence. In v. 30 he responds to the order by Solomon's henchman Benaiah that he is to leave the tent of Yhwh where he had sought sanctuary by saying "No, I will die here" (לֹא כִּי פֹה אָמוּת). Benaiah's reluctance to enter the holy place on a murderous mission sends him back to

⁸⁹ In fact, this indirect use of force—Solomon's ordering others to carry out the killings of his enemies—is the more common way that kings display their manly bellicosity. Note that before David's coronation in 1 Sam 5, he frequently triumphs over his enemies through his own power (his slaying of Goliath in 1 Sam 17, his slaughter of two hundred Philistines in 1 Sam 18). However, after that point others fight and kill on his behalf (e.g., he arranges Uriah's death in 2 Sam 11; and his warrior Abishai's defends him from the threat of death at the hands of the Philistine champion Ishbi-benob in 2 Sam 21:16-17).

Solomon requesting new orders. Solomon's response is the height of morbid wit: "Do as he said, strike him down and bury him" (v. 31). In other words, "Joab said he would die there; he has condemned himself, so go make his words come true." Such cunning political maneuvers exemplify the kind of political "wisdom" David recommended to his son as essential to becoming a man.

The Torah obedience highlighted in David's deathbed instructions (1 Kgs 2:3-4) is not explicitly reflected in Solomon's actions in the remainder of his maturation tale in 1 Kgs 2. However, the motivation behind this Torah obedience, ensuring the Davidic lineage, is evident. For example, when commissioning Benaiah to execute Joab in v. 33, Solomon expresses his wish that this act will result in peace from Yhwh for *David, his* descendents, *his* house, and *his* throne. Solomon's final words in the narrative (v.46) similarly demonstrate the significance of issues of lineage—both David's and his own: "But King Solomon shall be blessed, and the throne of David shall be established before the Lord forever." Thus, while Solomon does not mention the Torah of Yhwh at all in the remainder of 1 Kgs 2, his repeated reference to his father's memory and legacy suggests that he is aware of the deeper motivation behind David's advice to keep Yhwh's commandments.

Finally, Solomon's defense of his father's honor—and by extension Solomon's own honor—provides the motive for his actions in the latter half of 1 Kgs 2. Solomon claims that the motivation for killing Joab is to remove (Hiphil of סוּר) the shameful stain of bloodguilt from both himself and his father's house (v. 31). Furthermore, before executing Shimei in v. 44, Solomon reminds him of his disloyal acts against his father David. As David's counsel and Solomon's actions show, an honorable man does not allow such disloyalty against himself or his family to go unpunished.

To be sure, Solomon personifies strength, wisdom/cleverness, and a concern with lineage and honor in the latter verses of 1 Kgs 2. These are the same traits that David's final words indicated were necessary if Solomon was to become a man. They mark his transition from the boyish character at the beginning of the story to the powerful man and ruler at its end. However, along with these qualities there are three more hints in the text that highlight Solomon's transition to manhood. The first is found in the related and corresponding verses (vv. 12, 46) that enclose most of the narrative in 1 Kgs 2. The first verse reports that "Solomon sat on the throne of his father David; and his kingdom was firmly established" (v. 12). This verse describes Solomon before he has acted on David's advice. In contrast, v. 46, which is found after Solomon's purge of the court, contains an important difference: "So the kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon." The

latter verse is much clearer about Solomon's proactive role in the kingdom's security.

The kingdom is not passively "firmly established" as in v. 12, but is established "in the hand of Solomon" — a subtle, but significant contrast that highlights Solomon's transition from passive child to robust man and proactive ruler.⁹⁰

The second hint is that, for the first time in the narrative, Solomon displays an independence from his mother; in fact, he criticizes her for failing to see Adonijah's intentions in requesting Abishag's hand (1 Kgs 2:22-24). Given how close the relationship between Bathsheba and Solomon had been up to this point and how that relationship had been used by the narrator to stress Solomon's childishness, such an act of self-sufficiency by Solomon represents a significant move towards masculine maturation for the young king.

Finally, as both Montgomery and Šanda have each speculated, it is possible that the text block of 1 Kgs 1-2 does not end with the final verse of 1 Kgs 2 but instead includes 1 Kgs 3:1a, which reports that Solomon "made a marriage alliance with

⁹⁰ This contrast is emphasized further if "in the hand of Solomon" is understood to mean "through Solomon's agency" instead of "under Solomon's control." Both translations of the Hebrew בְּיָד are possible. See J. Bergman, W. von Soden, P. R. Ackroyd, " בְּיָד ," *TDOT* 5:410.

Pharaoh king of Egypt.”⁹¹ If Šanda and Montgomery are correct, this narrative note once again draws attention to Solomon’s maturation into manhood, since marriage is one of the definitive markers of manhood in the biblical text. To conclude this narrative with the report that Solomon married, then, would signify that his masculine development is finally complete.

Before I discuss the alternative tale of Solomon’s coming-of-age in 1 Kgs 3, a review of the major themes of his maturation in 1 Kgs 1-2 is warranted. David’s deathbed instructions in 1 Kgs 2:1-9 not only encourage his son to “become a man,” but also specify how this transition is to be accomplished. Solomon—until this point in the narrative characterized by passivity and a close, dependent relationship to his mother—must learn to wield violence effectively, to display “cleverness,” to perpetuate his father’s lineage through Torah obedience; and he must settle his father’s unfinished business to ensure David’s image as an honorable man. Solomon follows the directions of his father exactly, and by the end of the story has shown himself a proactive man. His masculine development culminates in the announcement of his marriage in 3:1a, which functions as the natural ending to this tale of coming-of-age.

⁹¹ See Albert Šanda, *Die Bücher der Könige* (EHAT 9; Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1911), 53-54; James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Kings* (ICC 10; New York: Scribner’s, 1951), 102.

3.3.2 Solomon's coming-of-age in 1 Kgs 3

A second version of Solomon's coming-of-age is found in 1 Kgs 3:4-15. This well-known tale of Solomon's dream vision of Yhwh at Gibeon presents a different understanding of how a young immature male transitions from boyhood to manhood. The story recounts how Solomon is given *carte blanche* by the deity to request anything he requires. In response, Solomon chooses wisdom, which he is granted by Yhwh together with riches, honor, and—if Solomon will follow Yhwh's commandments—a long life.

3.3.2.1 Solomon's youth

As was the case with 1 Kgs 1-2, it is necessary to establish that Solomon is initially described as a youth in this pericope. This is especially important because to the reader viewing 1 Kgs 1-3 as a unitary text, it appears that Solomon has already matured fully into a man by 1 Kgs 3:1, as I have just shown. Given the relative brevity of this tale vis-à-vis the larger block in 1 Kgs 1-2, the textual clues pointing to Solomon's youth are not as numerous, yet they are still evident. Indeed, the best indicator of his youth in 1 Kgs 3 is explicitly stated by the character himself with his response to Yhwh's open-ended offer. Before requesting wisdom, Solomon outlines how challenging it will be to

rule Yhwh's people given that, in Solomon's words in v. 7, he is only a נַעַר קָטָן (literally, "a little boy").⁹²

In light of the brevity of this passage, this narrative detail should be sufficient to sustain the case for Solomon's youthfulness in 1 Kgs 3. Indeed, even in the longer narrative in 1 Kgs 1-2 Solomon's youth is never so plainly stated. Still, other indications of Solomon's boyishness appear in this passage. For example, Solomon follows his request for an "understanding mind" in v. 9 by adding that the motive for this request is not only to judge the people, but also "to discern between good and evil" (לְהַבִּין בֵּין-טוֹב וּלְרָע). This phrase may also reveal Solomon's youth in light of Deut 1:39, where Moses declares that it is only the *children* of the exodus generation who will be permitted to occupy Canaan. In describing these children, Moses refers to them as those who "do not know good and evil" (לֹא יָדְעוּ הַיּוֹם טוֹב וָרָע). Clark argues that this description in Deuteronomy is the biblical Hebrew equivalent of the modern English term "minors" — that is, those whom the law does not consider fully responsible for their actions because

⁹² The presence of the adjective קָטָן ("little" or "young") here provides all the context necessary to conclude that נַעַר in this instance should be translated with a life-cycle noun denoting youth (i.e., "boy"). Note also the similarities between Solomon's claim to be a small boy and the Egyptian Stele of Thutmose IV, in which the Pharaoh similarly identifies himself before a deity as a child. See Siegfried Hermann, "Die Königsnovelle in Ägypten und Israel," *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Karl-Marx Universität* 3 (1953-54): 51-62. Long, noting that since this Egyptian inscription describes the Pharaoh's gifts to the gods in exchange for a long reign and afterlife, dismisses these similarities as "remote from 1 Kings 3, both in content and general intention" (*I Kings*, 65).

of their youth. He further contends in light of other biblical legal material that this phrase likely indicates an age under twenty.⁹³ If the narrator is drawing upon Deuteronomy here—a proposition that is bolstered since the language of this short pericope reflects Deuteronomistic theology, a point that I will address below—Solomon’s request to discern between good and evil indicates his youth. In other words, Solomon is, by his own admission, acknowledging that he has not reached the legal age of majority.

Next, Weitzman claims that the phrase immediately following Solomon’s confession of immaturity and youthfulness in 1 Kgs 3:7 (“I do not know how to go out or come in”) may likewise reveal the character’s young age. While most scholars believe that the phrase “to go out and come in” refers to military endeavors, Weitzman claims that in this case it may be “an admission of sexual inexperience.”⁹⁴ His argument is strengthened when considering that in the many examples of the phrase “going out and coming in” used in an obviously military context, no one is ever said to “know (יָדַע) going out and coming in”—the phrase Solomon employs here. Given the sexual undertones of the verb יָדַע, its anomalous use in this common construction may point to

⁹³ W. Malcolm Clark, “A Legal Background to the Yahwist’s Use of ‘Good and Evil’ in Genesis 2-3,” *JBL* 88 (1969): 274.

⁹⁴ Steven Weitzman, *Solomon: The Lure of Wisdom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 26. For the view that the phrase refers to military endeavors, see 229 n. 105.

the sexual meaning proposed by Weitzman.⁹⁵ While the military meaning of the phrase is much more likely, it is possible that this is a case of double entendre, by which the narrator emphasizes Solomon's youth because of his lack of sexual experience.

An obvious problem with these claims of Solomon's youth is that he marries in 3:1. Since marriage is so determinative of biblical manhood, it appears wrongheaded to consider him a boy in the following text. However, as already noted, at least two scholars (Šanda and Montgomery) argue that the report of Solomon's marriage to Pharaoh's daughter constitutes the conclusion to the narrative in 1 Kgs 1-2. If they are correct, this objection would be irrelevant. Solomon's marriage, in this case, would belong to the conclusion of a different maturation narrative (1 Kgs 1-2), and therefore his married status would not be assumed at the introduction of the maturation narrative in 1 Kgs 3.

However, even if Šanda and Montgomery are wrong, 3:1 should still not be considered the proper introduction to the tale of Solomon at Gibeon. Scholars are unanimous in their belief that 1 Kgs 3:1-3 represents a separate textual unit from the

⁹⁵ Weitzman himself does not notice the exceptional nature of the phrase "to know good and evil," nor does he highlight the sexual overtones of the verb יָדָע, even though these observations would significantly advance his case.

Gibeon dream narrative in 3:4-15.⁹⁶ The hand of the Deuteronomistic editor is obvious in vv. 2-3, as the vocabulary and style matches the summary royal notices that report the beginning and end of most reigns in 1-2 Kings and that serve as a structuring device throughout the books.⁹⁷ Verse 1 does not contain such obvious indications of editorial composition; however, its contextual dissonance with the surrounding narrative and its total absence in the LXX (only to be added in the LXX together with the information in MT 9:16 after the current MT 5:14) have caused the majority of commentators to consider it “a redactional note formed from notices in 1 Kgs 7:8, 9:16, and/or 9:24.”⁹⁸ The indications of Solomon’s youth in the Gibeon dream narrative just discussed, therefore, are not discredited by the report of Solomon’s marriage in 1 Kgs 3:1, a verse that either represents the conclusion of the previous independent narrative (1 Kgs 1-2) or is an editorial note likely added quite late in the development of the biblical text.

⁹⁶ For a discussion of the scholarly consensus on this question, including an extensive bibliography, see Carr, *Royal Ideology*, 24-30. See also Long, *1 Kings*, 61-63. It is also important to note that even Kenik—who alone among scholars in considering the Gibeon dream narrative to be a compositional unity written by DtrH—views 1 Kgs 3:1-3 as “entirely distinct from the narrative [of vv. 4-15]” that was only added later as an introduction to the story (Helen A. Kenik, *Design for Kingship: The Deuteronomistic Narrative Technique in 1 Kings 3:4-15* [SBLDS 15; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1983], 179n8).

⁹⁷ See, e.g., 1 Kgs 22:41-43 (22:41-44 MT); 2 Kgs 14:1-4; 15:1-4.

⁹⁸ Carr, *Royal Ideology*, 24.

3.3.2.2 Solomon becomes a man

Having established a valid case for seeing Solomon initially as a youth in 1 Kgs 3, the next step in arguing that this narrative is an alternative account of Solomon's coming-of-age is to show how he transitions out of his former boyishness in the narrative. Solomon's departure from boyishness is marked when Yhwh unconditionally grants him wisdom, riches, and honor at the conclusion of his dream vision in vv. 12-13. I have already demonstrated that both wisdom and honor (כְּבוֹד) are characteristic features of biblical masculinity. To be sure, riches are less closely associated with biblical masculinity and the image of the man as the "bread-winner" is purely a modern construction.⁹⁹ Yet, riches are often a sign of God's favor in the Bible, and certainly contribute to a man's status in comparison to his fellow men—indeed, Yhwh explicitly values the riches he is giving to Solomon in comparison to the wealth of other *men* (לֹא בְּמִלְכִּים; v. 13).¹⁰⁰

Arguably, then, these three divine gifts to Solomon provide the necessary changes in Solomon's character that will transform him from a נֶעֶר קֵטָן into a man. Moreover, Yhwh does not promise to give Solomon these gifts in the future. On the

⁹⁹ See Connell, *Masculinities*, 29.

¹⁰⁰ For the connection between riches and Yhwh's blessing, see e.g., Prov 10:22.

contrary, both appearances of the verb “to give” (נתן) in vv. 12-13—where Yhwh announces his decision to grant Solomon gifts—are in the perfect tense. This tense indicates that the action is completed and the wisdom, riches, and honor have been fully bequeathed at that moment. Solomon need not look to the future for the moment when he can be considered a man; he is already a man, having received these gifts from Yhwh.¹⁰¹

The final indicator that this tale should be read as Solomon’s coming-of-age is the incorporation of the tripartite rite-of-passage structure, which is also found in David’s coming-of-age narrative in 1 Sam 17. As emphasized above, the presence of a rite-of-passage structure highlights the coming-of-age theme in a narrative, particularly if the main character begins the narrative as a youth and subsequently experiences an important change in the course of the story. Solomon’s rite of passage begins with his *separation* from his home and family by leaving Jerusalem to go to Gibeon (1 Kgs 3:4). While in Gibeon, the young Solomon is afforded a vision of the divine and receives special knowledge and skill that will guide him in his adult life as king. According to

¹⁰¹ Since Yhwh has already given Solomon the gifts that transform him from a boy into a man by v. 13, the obedience to Yhwh’s statutes and commandments recommended to Solomon in v. 14 is not a constituent component of his masculine maturation in this narrative. This is not to argue that Torah obedience is unimportant in the masculinity described in this story, but simply to note that it is not emphasized as essential to *becoming* a man. Note also that the motivation for obedience to Yhwh in this narrative is a long life (v. 14), not the perpetuation of the Davidic line as in 1 Kgs 1-2.

Turner, a crucial part of the liminal phase of a rite of passage is the revelation of special gnosis by a divine figure (usually mediated through an older tribesman) to the young initiate.¹⁰² Yhwh's revelation of unique wisdom to Solomon at Gibeon thus has typical features of the *liminal* stage of a rite of passage. Furthermore, Gibeon is uniquely suited to be the location for the liminal phase of Solomon's rite of passage because the town itself is defined by liminality.¹⁰³ Finally, Solomon in v. 15 is *reincorporated* into community amid the feasting and sacrifices characteristic of this phase of a rite of passage.

Taken together with Solomon's youthful portrayal in the Gibeon dream narrative and the fact that by its end Yhwh has given to Solomon the very manly qualities of honor, wealth, and wisdom, the presence of the rite-of-passage structure serves to highlight the importance of the coming-of-age theme to this tale.

3.3.3 Summary

In sum, this examination of Solomon's coming-of-age in 1 Kings reveals that there are two contrasting versions of this story. Both 1 Kgs 1-2 and 1 Kgs 3 begin by

¹⁰² See Victor W. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1967), 98-101.

¹⁰³ Gibeon lies in the heart of the Israelite kingdom, yet is peopled by foreigners (Hivites). Geographically, it sits on contested border land between the tribes of Benjamin and Judah. These observations on Gibeon's liminality were brought to my attention by Dale Loepp (personal communication, February 2012).

describing Solomon with language unmistakably associated with boyhood in the HB. The narratives then proceed to detail how Solomon transitions out of this boyish state and becomes a man by the story's end. However, the ways in which Solomon accomplishes this transition and the kind of man that he becomes upon its completion differ considerably in the two narratives. A detailed discussion of these differences and their larger significance, as well as a comparison of both stories with David's coming-of-age in 1 Sam 17, is offered in the section below.

3.4 Thematic Comparison of the Royal Coming-Of-Age Stories

In the final section of this chapter, I will compare how the three coming-of-age stories examined above narrate their main character's transition from boyhood to manhood. The purpose is not merely to point out subtle differences between the articulations of a literary theme in three different sources, however. My analysis of the coming-of-age theme also attempts to demonstrate: (1) how a narrator/redactor can use this theme to emphasize broader messages and transitions in the historical narratives in the HB; and (2) how these stories can provide unique insight into the biblical conception

of hegemonic masculinity.¹⁰⁴ I conclude my discussion in this chapter, therefore, with a brief discussion of how the coming-of-age theme highlights a transition in the narrative of Israel's history and a proposal for understanding the diachronic development of biblical views of hegemonic masculinity as informed by royal coming-of-age stories.

The two tales of Solomon's coming-of-age provide a starting-point. Certain differences between the two tales of maturation are evident upon a cursory glance. For instance, while Solomon takes a proactive role in his transition from boy to man in 1 Kgs 1-2 and the scene plays out on the political stage, in 1 Kgs 3 he is the recipient of his manhood from Yhwh and the story is set within sacred space (the "high place" or *בִּמְה* at Gibeon). In addition, the second story employs a rite-of-passage structure to highlight the coming-of-age theme, while the first does not.

Yet some of the most significant differences between the two versions of Solomon's coming-of-age story only come to light when considering the image of masculinity offered in the respective narratives. In other words, the qualities of manhood that the boy Solomon embodies by the conclusion of these two stories differ considerably. For example, Solomon receives and displays "wisdom" as part of his transition to manhood in both narratives but this attribute is portrayed in quite distinct

¹⁰⁴ See chapter 1, 55.

ways. In 1 Kgs 1-2, “wisdom” is better understood as tactical savvy or cleverness—it is the ability to recognize a rebellion before it manifests itself and to use his political opponents’ own words to condemn them. In contrast, Solomon’s wisdom in 1 Kgs 3 is seen as the antidote for Solomon’s fears about leading the nation of Israel; and it is associated with the verbs שפט (“to judge”) and בין (“to discern;” see vv. 9, 11). This wisdom is therefore not the shrewd skill of chapter 2 but is instead the ability to rule the people justly. Appropriately, the story that immediately follows the Gibeon dream narrative showcases Solomon’s unique *judicial* insights: the famous story of two prostitutes and the baby both claims as her own.

Another distinction is seen in Solomon’s capacity for violence. This trait, which is so important to manhood in 1 Kgs 1-2, is rejected in the Gibeon tale of 1 Kgs 3, where Solomon’s declaration of youth in v. 7 is further amplified by his confession that he does not know “how to go out or come in.” While other meanings of this phrase may be possible—as discussed above—most scholars agree that “to go out and come in” means to lead a military force.¹⁰⁵ Thus Solomon feels unready to lead Israel because he can neither effectively employ bellicose violence nor lead others in its use; this more than

¹⁰⁵ See Anton Van Der Lingen, “*Bw’ -Yš’* (‘To Go Out and To Come In’) as a Military Term,” *VT* 42 (1992): 59-66. Van Der Lingen considers each use of the term separately and finds that the vast majority of its uses have a military context (see, e.g., Josh 14:10-11). Of 1 Kgs 3:7, he suggests the following translation: “...I do not know how to go to war successfully as a commander” (ibid., 66).

anything makes him a boy. Yhwh, however, does not share Solomon's belief that manhood and violence are intertwined. Yhwh mentions "the life of [Solomon's] enemies" as a potential blessing in v. 11 but pointedly does not give this to Solomon in the subsequent speech (vv. 12-14). This observation is even more noteworthy given that the subjugation of enemies is routinely mentioned as a gift of Yhwh to Israelite/Judahite kings—alongside riches and glory—in various royal coronation psalms.¹⁰⁶ Beyond that, at the beginning of his reign Solomon receives the riches, honor, and even conditionally the length of days referred to in these psalms but, significantly, not the defeat of his enemies. As a result, the message is clear: Solomon's manhood will not be defined by the violence that had so marked the narration of his coming-of-age in 1 Kgs 1-2.

Next, honor represents a feature of masculinity in both narratives; however its importance in 1 Kgs 1-2 is greater than in 1 Kgs 3. In 1 Kgs 1-2, Solomon's actions are often motivated by his desire to settle his father's scores, which demonstrate his concern with defending familial honor. In contrast, honor (כְּבוֹד) is also a part of the story's construction of masculinity in 1 Kgs 3:4-15, but it is not valued as highly as in 1 Kgs 1-2. Yhwh does grant Solomon honor as a feature of the king's manhood in 1 Kgs 3 (v. 13) but only as an afterthought. Instead, "a wise and discerning mind" (v. 12) is clearly

¹⁰⁶ See in particular Ps 21, where the king is given "splendor and majesty" (v. 5), "rich blessings" (v. 3), and "long life" (v. 4) but is also given victory over his enemies (vv. 9-12).

valued far more than honor, since Solomon's request for wisdom is looked upon with favor by Yhwh and leads the deity to grant the less-esteemed gifts of riches and honor as a reward for Solomon's choice. Moreover, the honor in 1 Kgs 3 is not associated with the need to defend it by force, as in 1 Kgs 1-2. In sum, maintaining honor is a component of masculinity articulated in 1 Kgs 3, but it is of secondary importance after wisdom and obedience to Yhwh and is disassociated with violent force.

Finally, while the self-control that comes with Torah obedience is mentioned in both narratives of Solomon's maturation, it is emphasized as essential to becoming a man in the first story, whereas in the second story it is mentioned after Yhwh has already bequeathed to Solomon the gifts that transform him from a boy into a man. Moreover, the reward for obedience to Yhwh's commandments is different in each story. Recall that in the first narrative David's pious wish that Solomon follow Yhwh's commandments (1 Kgs 2:3-4) is motivated and justified by the promise to continue David's lineage if his descendents will obey Yhwh. Torah obedience, therefore, is subsumed under considerations of lineage—i.e., the wish that David (and by extension Solomon) would "have a name in Israel." In 1 Kgs 3:14, this direct connection between lineage and Torah obedience is not present; instead, Yhwh tells Solomon that if he obeys the deity's statutes and commandments, then he will have a long life.

Comparing the two versions of Solomon's coming-of-age, therefore, reveals substantive differences in both the manner in which Solomon becomes a man and the qualities of manhood that he eventually embodies. In 1 Kgs 1-2, Solomon is initially presented as a boy, but through the proactive exertion of violent force on the political stage, the display of shrewd tactical "wisdom," and the defense of his father's honorable reputation and lineage, he becomes a man by the story's end. In 1 Kgs 3, the boy Solomon attains manhood in a less bellicose manner. The youthful and inexperienced Solomon does not proactively assert his manhood on the political stage via the adept use of violence, but instead is given everything he needs to be a man by Yhwh. Wisdom is understood as judicial or administrative acumen, not cleverness. Honor is not as significant a concern as in 1 Kgs 1-2, nor is the establishment of the Davidic lineage. And finally, the structure of a rite-of-passage is found in this version of the story but not in 1 Kgs 1-2.

While comparing the two tales of Solomon's coming-of-age primarily highlights their differences, a look at the story of David's coming-of-age in 1 Sam 17 reveals its thematic similarities to the story of Solomon's maturation in 1 Kgs 1-2.¹⁰⁷ First, in both 1

¹⁰⁷ The similarities between 1 Kgs 1-2 and David's coming-of-age in 1 Sam 17 should perhaps come as no surprise from a literary perspective, because David himself defines what constitutes masculinity and

Sam 17 and 1 Kgs 1-2 the expression of manly strength through violent force is important. Moreover, this force is employed in the defense of honor: David kills Goliath in order to protect the honor of Israel by removing (סור; 1 Sam 17:26) the shame and reproach of the Philistine's insult; Solomon executes Joab to remove (סור; 1 Kgs 2:31) the reproach of bloodguilt from David's good name and the reputation of his house.¹⁰⁸ Second, "wisdom" is viewed as craftiness in both stories: Solomon's wisdom is seen in his ability to sense incipient rebellion and in his use of his enemies' words against them; David's wisdom is indicated by his use of unconventional weapons and tactics to overcome his oversized Philistine foe. Third, if 1 Kgs 3:1a is viewed as the conclusion of Solomon's first coming-of-age tale, then marriage functions as the culmination of Solomon's manly deeds just as it serves as the ultimate reward for David's heroic victory over Goliath.

Arguably, the thematic similarities between these two coming-of-age stories indicate a close relationship between the textual block of 1 Kgs 1-2 and the preceding books of Samuel, in agreement with Rost's classic formulation of this relationship.

"becoming a man" with his deathbed speech (1 Kgs 2:2-9) in this version of Solomon's coming-of-age. David, understandably, advises his son to mature in the same way that he did.

¹⁰⁸ Shimei, similarly, is executed to avenge David (v. 44).

Solomon's coming-of-age here has a retrospective quality that corresponds with the tone of the immediately preceding narrative, in which a major character—David—has died.¹⁰⁹ In contrast, the tale of David's maturation in 1 Sam 17 differs radically with the construction of masculinity and the means for attaining manhood presented in 1 Kgs 3.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, as opposed to the retrospective tone of 1 Kgs 1-2, the Gibeon dream narrative presents a view of manhood that points forward to the Solomon of 1 Kgs 3-10: the wise and peaceful builder of a mighty empire. Therefore, while the coming-of-age theme is used in 1 Kgs 1-2 to emphasize continuity with the past, in 1 Kgs 3 it highlights an important transition in the historical narrative of Israel from a time of war to one of peace.

Finally, as suggested above, comparing the coming-of-age theme in these three stories may also provide insight into the diachronic development of the Israelite construction of masculinity. An important observation informing my reconstruction of

¹⁰⁹ The presence of a farewell speech in this chapter further emphasizes this retrospective quality. Long argues that such speeches are important to the larger literary context because they provide a "definitive theological perspective" on the era or life that is coming to a close with the death of the speaker (Long, *I Kings*, 45).

¹¹⁰ This conclusion holds despite the fact that 1 Sam 17 and 1 Kgs 3 employ the same formal narrative technique of using the rite of passage structure to tell their respective tales of maturation. However, the contrasts between the two tales' use of this structural technique are noteworthy: in David's liminal stage, he proves himself physically by defeating the embodiment of the ordeals typically endured by initiates; in Solomon's, the imparting of special knowledge—also characteristic of tribal rites of passage—is emphasized. Given the common association of rites of passage with coming-of-age, it should be expected that different stories describing maturation would employ the structure independently of one another.

this development is Carr's argument that the original folkloric *Vorlage* behind the Gibeon story in 1 Kgs 3 has received a heavy DtrH editing in the course of its textual history.¹¹¹ Carr shows the presence of stereotyped Deuteronomistic language hearkening back to the Torah throughout the story, attributing the following portions of the narrative to the Deuteronomistic editor: 3:3, 6aβb, 8, 9, 11aα4-b, 12bβ, 13b, 14a.¹¹² In contrast, the influence of DtrH's editing is far less evident in both 1 Kgs 1-2 and 1 Sam 17.¹¹³ Assuming with most scholars that the historical narratives found in 1 Kgs 1-2 and 1 Sam 17 preceded DtrH, it is possible to argue that Dtr heavily edited an independent story about Solomon (the Gibeon story) and placed it immediately alongside the previous story of the king's maturation in 1 Kgs 1-2 in order to present an alternative articulation of manhood and coming-of-age.

¹¹¹ For Carr's extensive discussion of the DtrH editing of 1 Kgs 3, see *Royal Ideology*, 178-207. Carr assumes a Josianic DtrH but this is not central to his argument. My suggestions below assume an exilic or post-exilic DtrH.

¹¹² See Carr, *Royal Ideology*, 127. Note also that Carr believes that the addition of 1 Kgs 3:1 (the report of Solomon's wedding to Pharaoh's daughter) comes from a post-DtrH redactor. See *ibid.*, 203-5.

¹¹³ Noth considered David's final words to Solomon in 1 Kgs 2:2-9 entirely as the work of DtrH, since Noth argued that lengthy speeches at the end of a major character's life were DtrH's preferred way of marking structural transitions in the historical narrative (Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History* [JSOTSup 15; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981], 4-11). However, David's farewell speech contains far fewer references to the characteristic theology of DtrH than other farewell speeches Noth identifies as DtrH's handiwork, such as Joshua's in Josh 23 or Samuel's in 1 Sam 12. Instead David's speech is primarily concerned, as I have shown, with sealing the fate of David's enemies and ensuring that the kingdom is in capable hands. DtrH's theology is perhaps evident in vv. 3-4, where David recommends Torah obedience to Solomon. Still, even here this typical feature of DtrH thought is appropriately altered to fit the context of the rest of the speech, as it is solely linked to the continued perpetuation of the Davidic line. See above, 211 n. 84.

In this view, DtrH's goal was to describe and advocate a new kind of man, and a new way of becoming such a man. In the new conception of masculinity offered by DtrH, the violence and vendettas characteristic of the older understanding of manhood found in 1 Kgs 1-2 (and earlier in 1 Sam 17) are deemphasized. Similarly, the importance of honor is diminished, particularly honor that requires defense by force as in 1 Sam 17 and 1 Kgs 1-2. Wisdom in the service of personal advancement and unmoored from Yhwh's knowledge and justice, like the political savvy found in 1 Kgs 1-2, was minimized in favor of "the wisdom of God to execute justice" (1 Kgs 3:8). Finally, Torah obedience could no longer guarantee the continuation of royal lineage, an aspect of this new masculinity that would seem particularly appropriate to DtrH's exilic or post-exilic context because the Davidic monarchy no longer reigned in Jerusalem during this time. Instead, for DtrH, Torah obedience results in a long life. Therefore, by placing the narrative where he did and by using the same coming-of-age theme as the preceding narrative, DtrH gives an image of a new Israelite man for a new age.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ The conclusions here challenge Mobley's claim that the Israel's "heroic age," where men displayed their masculinity through military exploits and the display of might through violence, ended with Solomon (see *Empty Men*, 229-34). *Pace* Mobley, I argue that the connection between Israelite manhood and violence is broken with *DtrH's retelling* of the Solomon coming-of-age narrative in 1 Kgs 3 but is still present in the earlier version of that tale in 1 Kgs 1-2.

In the next chapter, the investigation of the coming-of-age theme in the HB turns to the maturation tales of two prophetic figures: Moses' transition to manhood in Exod 2, and Samuel's transition in 1 Sam 3. The chapter includes a comparison of these two stories with each other and with the tales of royal maturation discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 4: Moses and Samuel: Case Studies of Prophetic Maturation

In the preceding chapter I examined royal coming-of-age narratives. In this chapter, I continue my analysis of coming-of-age narratives by looking at two well-known figures from the HB: Moses and Samuel. The narratives of their respective transitions from boyhood to manhood are considered together for two reasons. First, they are both *non-royal* coming-of-age stories. Second, and more significantly, the roles Moses and Samuel play as religious, political, and military leaders are remarkably similar. Still, I refer to these stories as *prophetic* coming-of-age narratives because the title of מְנַבֵּי is the only one that Samuel and Moses explicitly share, despite the many similarities between their offices as Israel's religious/political/military leader.¹

The structure of this chapter's argument is similar to that of the preceding chapter: I begin by making the case for the presence of the coming-of-age theme in each story. Additionally, I provide a detailed discussion of how the texts employ the theme — and what that may say about the understanding of manhood offered in the passage. After considering the two stories separately, I conclude the chapter by comparing the use of the coming-of-age theme in the respective narratives. This section will also entail

¹ Moses is called a מְנַבֵּי in Deut 18:15, 18; 34:10. The term is used of Samuel in 1 Sam 3:20.

an assessment of the stories of prophetic maturation vis-à-vis those of royal maturation in an effort to discern the potential similarities and differences between them.

4.1 “In Those Days, Moses Grew Up:” Exodus 2 and the Maturation of Moses

Moses’ coming-of-age is narrated in Exod 2. More specifically, the second “scene” in this chapter, Exod 2:11-22, is the central locus of the coming-of-age theme. However, some of the tactics employed by the narrator to draw attention to this theme only become evident when considering it alongside its counterpart in Exod 2:1-10—the story of Moses’ birth and rescue by Pharaoh’s daughter.² Therefore, an examination of

² The overall unity of Exod 2:1-22, a foundational assumption of a reading like mine that divides the larger narrative into two scenes, has been demonstrated by a number of scholars. Carol Meyers (*Exodus* [New Cambridge Bible Commentary; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005], 46) identifies an *inclusio* formed by the reports of marriage and the birth of a son in v. 1 and v. 22, which serve to delimit the boundaries of the textual unit. John I. Durham (*Exodus* [WBC 3; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1987], 21) similarly argues for the unity of Exod 2:1-22. Propp (*Exodus 1-18*, 145-46; 162) shows how thematic unity binds the narrative block together (although he asserts that the section begins one verse earlier, in Exod 1:22) and uses the sevenfold repetition of key words in certain portions of the narrative to identify the borders of the scenes within the story (see below, 243 n. 8 and n. 10).

While precise identification of the initial source for Exod 2 is not essential for my argument, it is worth noting that most scholars consulted consider this block the work of J, who may have synthesized several earlier oral traditions in the composition. See e.g., Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 146; Brevard S. Childs (*The Book of Exodus* [OTL; Louisville: Westminster, 1976], 28); Martin Noth (*Exodus* [trans. B.S. Bowden; OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962], 25; 34-35); George W. Coats (*Exodus 1-18* [FOTL IIA; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999], 7; 18-19).

Exod 2:11-22 within its broader context is required to identify and discuss the coming-of-age theme.

A close look at the structure of Exod 2 reveals the importance to the story of highlighting Moses' maturation into manhood. The literary structure can be represented as follows:

Tales of Moses' Youth: Exod 2:1-22

Scene I (Exod 2:1-10): Moses' Birth Narrative

Scene II (Exod 2:11-22): Moses Comes of Age³

Episode 1 (vv. 11-12): Moses defends his Hebrew kinsman

Episode 2 (vv. 13-15a): Moses attempts to adjudicate
between his fellow Hebrews

Episode 3 (vv. 15b-22): Moses rescues Reuel's daughters and
marries.⁴

The transition from the first scene to the second scene in the larger narrative unit is marked by the clear shift in subject matter from Moses' infancy to his early adulthood

³ For the internal coherence of Scene II—as opposed to its being a random collection of unrelated traditions crudely joined by an editor—see Coats (*Exodus 1-18*, 30). Coats finds a similar structure in each episode of Scene II and identifies a unifying theme throughout the scene of Moses defending the oppressed.

⁴ The remaining verses in Exod 2 (vv. 23-25) are unrelated to the preceding pericope, being more of an “addendum” (Meyers, *Exodus*, 46) that likely comes originally from a separate source; see, e.g., Coats, *Exodus 1-18*, 33-34; Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 170; 178.

in v. 11.⁵ Additionally, the boundaries of the two scenes are set off by the repetition of a particular verb in the two verses at the juncture of the two scenes, vv. 10 and 11.

Significantly, that verb is גדל ("to grow"). By repeating this verb at this prominent location in the story's overall structure, the text emphasizes Moses' growth, making it the literal center of the narrative. Moreover, while the first instance of גדל in v. 10 describes the growth of the infant until he can be weaned and brought to Pharaoh's court, the second instance is often understood by scholars to imply that Moses has fully "grown up" and become a man by this time, owing to the presumably large time gap separating the two scenes.⁶

⁵ Others who recognize that v. 11 begins a new narrative segment within the larger story of Exod 2:1-22 include: Meyers (*Exodus*, 44-46); Coats (*Exodus 1-18*, 18-19; 25); Nahum M. Sarna (*Exodus: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991], 25); Terence E. Fretheim (*Exodus* [IBC; Louisville: John Knox, 1991], 41); Childs (*Book of Exodus*, 27); Propp (*Exodus 1-18*, 161); Moshe Greenberg (*Understanding Exodus* [New York: Behrman House, 1969], 44); and Jopie Siebert-Hommes ("But if She be a Daughter...She may Live! 'Daughters' and 'Sons' in Exodus 1-2," in *A Feminist Companion to Exodus to Deuteronomy* [ed. Athalya Brenner; FCB 6; Sheffield: Academic Press, 1994], 71-72).

⁶ See, e.g., Childs (*Book of Exodus*, 21); Umberto Cassuto (*A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* [trans. Israel Abrahams; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967], 21); and Greenberg (*Understanding Exodus*, 42). This reading is also supported by many translations (NRSV, NJPS, NAS, NJB) that render the second use of גדל in v. 11 as "grew up." The ambiguity of the verb גדל has generated much speculation concerning Moses' age in v. 11. Traditional and scribal conjecture on his age has run the gamut from forty (Acts 7:23-24) to twenty-one (*Jub.* 47:10; 48:11), twenty (*Exod. Rab* 5:2), eighteen, and twelve (for references, see Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, 5.404). It is noteworthy that with the exception of Acts 7 many of these sources consider Moses to be approximately at the age of legal majority in the Torah (i.e., twenty; see chapter 2, 80-81), which supports a coming-of-age reading. According to Ginzberg (*ibid.*), the tradition of Moses being forty at this time has more to do with a desire for symmetry than anything else: Moses is said to have died at age 120 (Deut 34:7), and he lived forty years in the wilderness (Josh 5:6). Therefore, one strand of tradition assumes that he lived forty years in Midian and forty in Egypt.

The preceding assumption is made problematic by the subsequent text in which Moses' adulthood is not so obvious (see below). Complicating the matter further is the fact that he remains unmarried until the conclusion of the narrative, which further suggests that he has not "grown up" entirely. Still, it is possible to maintain the translation of גדל in v. 11 as meaning "to grow up to adulthood" by following Levy's reading of v. 11. Levy argues that the clause in which the verb גדל is used (וַיְהִי בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם (וַיִּגְדַּל מֹשֶׁה) is a "descriptive heading for things to come" and not a "preliminary factual detail for the scene."⁷ The effect is to provide a veritable title for the following scene that introduces its most important theme: "In those days Moses grew up."

By making use of this structure for Exod 2—that is, seeing vv. 10-11 as the hinge between the two scenes—another narrative technique that draws emphasis to the coming-of-age theme emerges. In the first scene (vv. 1-10), in which Moses is depicted as an infant, the noun יָלֵד ("young boy") is repeated seven times, marking it as the critical

⁷ Bryna Jocheved Levy, "Moshe: Portrait of the Leader as a Young Man," in *Torah of the Mothers: Contemporary Jewish Women Read Classical Jewish Texts* (ed. Ora Wiskind Elper and Susan Handelman; New York: Urim Publications, 2000), 410. In this insightful article, Levy explores Exod 2:11-14 as Moses' "ethical coming of age," (ibid., 398) an argument with some similarities to mine. However, it is important to note that Levy does not treat the role of vv. 15-22 in Moses' maturation (as I do below), and her speculation is more concerned with Moses' *ethical* development, not his transition from boyhood to manhood.

Leitwort of this scene.⁸ In fact, the word יָלֵד is found in the exact center of the scene, with 70 words preceding it and 70 following it.⁹ In contrast, the second scene (vv. 11-22) repeats the word אִישׁ (“man”) seven times, with one instance of the plural אֲנָשִׁים.¹⁰ Furthermore, this second scene’s *Leitwort* is used to describe Moses by the scene’s conclusion in 2:19, 20; and notably Moses is never again referred to as a child after this point, having become “the man Moses” (הָאִישׁ מֹשֶׁה; Exod 11:3). By means of the sevenfold repetition of “boy” in the first scene and “man” in the second, the text highlights the shift within Moses from boy to man in Exod 2.

Accompanying this shift from the word יָלֵד in the first scene to אִישׁ in the second scene is the movement by Moses out of the world of women and into the world of men. Each major character other than the infant Moses in the first scene is female: Moses’ mother, his sister, Pharaoh’s daughter and her maids. In contrast, Moses father is conspicuously absent from the action in this scene aside from a brief mention of his marriage to Moses’ mother in 2:1. The second scene, in contrast, is almost exclusively

⁸ An observation made by Siebert-Hommes (“But if She be a Daughter,” 71). Propp (*Exodus 1-18*, 146), as already noted, also recognizes this repetition; however, by adding Exod 1:22 to the scene the number of repetitions rises to eight (seven uses of the singular and one of the plural), which Propp compares to the frequent seven-plus-one motif in Hebrew and Ugaritic poetry.

⁹ See Siebert-Hommes, “But if She be a Daughter,” 71.

¹⁰ Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 146. Propp notes that the repetition of יָלֵד and אִישׁ “may symbolize Moses’ maturation and socialization” (ibid., 162), later speculating that the scene “tells the familiar story of a young man growing up” (ibid., 176). Even so, Propp does not give more attention to the coming-of-age theme in Exod 2 than these brief comments.

concerned with men. The women that are mentioned — Reuel’s daughters — are not described in any great detail, especially in comparison to the attention paid to other women introduced in similar “meeting at the well” scenes in the HB (Rebekah in Gen 24; Rachel in Gen 29). Moreover, as Coats points out, the text of vv. 15-22 seems to focus less on describing Moses’ relationship to his wife Zipporah than on his connection through marriage to her father Reuel.¹¹

The transition in the story from the world of women to the world of men reflects the similar movement from female to male influence that marks the maturation of the male child in the biblical world.¹² As such, it is an appropriate narrative tactic for a narrative of coming-of-age.

In sum, the pericope from Exod 2:1-22 draws attention to the coming-of-age theme structurally by repeating the verbal root גדל (“to grow”) at the hinge between the two scenes that comprise the larger narrative (i.e., vv. 10-11). In so doing, it stresses growth as a significant aspect of the narrative, and the use of this verb in v. 11 perhaps also provides a title to the second scene: “In those days Moses grew up.” Finally, the first

¹¹ See George W. Coats, “Moses in Midian,” *JBL* 92 (1973): 3-10. Coats bases his contention not only on the paltry amount of attention paid to the courtship of Moses and Zipporah, but also on the return to the Jethro/Reuel tradition in Exod 18, in which the relationship of Moses to his father-in-law is stressed but where in contrast “[Moses’] wife and children are almost humorously ignored” (*ibid.*, 6).

¹² See chapter 2, 73-75, 131-32, 133-35, 138-39; see also 13-17.

scene's sevenfold repetition of the *Leitwort* יָלַד and its prevalence of female characters, when viewed in contrast with the second scene's repetition of the *Leitwort* שָׂא and dominance by male characters, mirrors Moses' transition from boy to man.

4.1.1 Describing Moses' Maturation in the Second Scene of Exodus 2

Having identified some broad tactics that the narrative employs to highlight Moses' coming-of-age, I will now indicate how the second scene in Exod 2 (vv. 11-22) describes his maturation. As previously mentioned, this scene has three episodes, which together represent Moses' coming-of-age. However, since each episode stresses different aspects of that maturation process, the three episodes will be explored separately in order to demonstrate how they individually depict and contribute to an understanding of Moses' transition to manhood.

4.1.1.1 Episode 1 (vv. 11-12): Moses defends his Hebrew kinsman

In the first episode of Exod 2 (vv. 11-12) Moses exhibits a fundamental characteristic of masculinity: strength, which is frequently demonstrated through the use of violent force against another man.¹³ Here, Moses encounters an Egyptian beating (Hiphil of נָכַח) a Hebrew man, an act that symbolizes the Hebrews' burdens under their oppressors. In an expression of proportional retributive justice, Moses retaliates on

¹³ See chapter 2, 61-67. See also chapter 3, 171-74, 213-14, and chapter 5, 291-94, 300-301.

behalf of the Hebrew, with whom Moses identifies as a kinsman (כֹּהֵן; v. 11), by slaying (נִכְה) the Egyptian. It is also noteworthy that this act exemplifies the *solidarity* Moses shares with his fellow kinsmen, a point previously identified as belonging to the description of biblical masculinity.¹⁴ Despite having been reared among the Egyptians in Pharaoh's court, Moses is here depicted as a Hebrew/Israelite man, willing to act forcefully in defense of a kinsman.

This episode further underscores—albeit subtly—Moses' development as a man. Before striking down the Egyptian, Moses looks around the area and sees that, according to v. 12, “there was no man” (אִין אִישׁ). While many have seen in this act Moses' desire to ensure that his retaliation remains hidden, another compelling interpretation popular among early rabbinic readings of this verse is possible.¹⁵ According to this alternative interpretation, Moses' survey to see if there was a “man” in the area is not motivated by a desire for secrecy but instead by a hope that someone else nearby will aid the abused Hebrew by putting a stop to the Egyptian's violence. Midrashic sources cite Isa 59:16 to support this reading, where אִין אִישׁ is used to describe how no one is available to challenge injustice, therefore compelling Yhwh to do so

¹⁴ See chapter 2, 91-92, and chapter 5, 315-16.

¹⁵ Those who prefer to view Moses' act of searching the area before slaying the Egyptian as a desire for secrecy include: Trent C. Butler (“An Anti-Moses Tradition,” JSOT 12 [1979]: 10); Childs (*Book of Exodus*, 30); and Dipalma (“De/Constructing Masculinity,” 42).

personally.¹⁶ Moreover, in *Pirkei Avot* 2.5, the declaration that “there was no man” in Exod 2:12 is understood as the basis for Hillel’s maxim “Where there are no men, try to be a man,” thereby indicating that at least according to this interpretation what is more at stake in this verse is not that there is no *person* present to act, but instead that no *man* is present.¹⁷

In light of this traditional interpretation, Exod 2:12 becomes a key verse in the coming-of-age reading of the larger story. When encountering violence against a fellow Hebrew, Moses finds to his dismay that there is no man who can counter this brutality with a masculine show of retaliatory strength. Thus the young Moses is himself forced to act as a man by overpowering and slaying the Egyptian.

In sum, episode 1 contributes robustly to the depiction of Moses’ transition from boy to man. The youthful Moses demonstrates both his physical strength and solidarity

¹⁶ See *Exod. Rab.* 1:29; *Lev. Rab.* 32:4. For parallels to the use of *אין איש* in Isa 59:16, see Isa 41:28 and 50:2. Among modern interpreters, this reading is preferred by Cassuto (*Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 22) and Benno Jacob (*The Second Book of the Bible: Exodus* [trans. W. Jacob; Hoboken, N.J.: Ktav, 1992], 37-38). Propp (*Exodus 1-18*, 163) prefers a synthesis of this interpretation with that identifying a wish for secrecy in Moses’ actions, writing that “the absence of bystanders both forces Moses to act and gives him hope of impunity.”

¹⁷ Ari Zivotofsky (“The Leadership Qualities of Moses,” *Judaism* 43 [1994]: 260), in agreement with this midrashic interpretation, argues that by announcing that no “man” is present, the text means “a real man willing to take action.” Zivotofsky’s argument suffers, however, for equating all action with manhood, an equation belied by the notable instances in Exod 1-2 where women are the active agents of liberation (e.g., Shiphrah and Puah in Exod 1; Moses’ mother and Pharaoh’s daughter in the first scene of Exod 2). It is not that a *man* is needed to act, but instead that the style of action demanded by the situation in Exod 2:11-12, physical force, is one more suited to a man in the worldview of the HB.

with his fellow adult male kinsmen. Furthermore, Moses acts courageously because no other *man* is present, a deed indicating that Moses is taking on that role and is himself becoming a man.¹⁸

4.1.1.2 Episode 2 (vv. 13-15a): Moses attempts to adjudicate between his fellow Hebrews

The second episode in the scene describing Moses' coming-of-age, like the first, depicts Moses exhibiting a quality typically associated with masculinity in the HB: wisdom, specifically juridical wisdom.¹⁹ In v. 13, Moses mediates between two Hebrew men who are fighting, admonishing the guilty party (הַרְשָׁע) for striking his companion (רֵעֵ). Moses' juridical wisdom is seen in his immediate recognition and criticism of the guilty party in the quarrel. The prevalence of words associated with biblical

¹⁸ This interpretation of episode 1 is premised upon a positive view of Moses' action in this scene. Some readers, however, believe that the text is condemnatory of Moses' killing of the Egyptian (DiPalma ["De/Constructing Masculinity," 42-44]; Butler ["Anti-Moses," 10, 13]). Others believe that the text is neutral on the matter, leaving the final judgment of Moses' act to the audience (Childs, *Book of Exodus*, 44). Three features of the text militate against these readings. First, the fact that the same verb is used to describe Moses' killing of the Egyptian and the Egyptian's abuse of the Hebrew (נָכַח) suggests that the narrator views Moses' deed as justified proportional retribution. Second, Moses' act prefigures Yhwh's liberating work later in the narrative—where again the root נָכַח is employed to describe Yhwh's punishment of the Egyptians (Exod 3:20; 7:25; 12:12, 13, 29; 9:15). This further points to a positive assessment of Moses' actions (The previous two points are made by Fretheim [*Exodus*, 43] and Cassuto [*Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 22]). Third, this episode precedes two others in which Moses defends an oppressed group or individual, thereby leading the reader to view the episode similarly as an instance of Moses' concern for justice.

¹⁹ For the connection between biblical masculinity and wisdom, see chapter 2, 67-69.

jurisprudence such as רִשְׁעָה and שֹׁפֵט calls further attention to the legal context.²⁰

Moreover, the guilty Hebrew's response to Moses (v.14), in questioning his right to serve as a judge (שֹׁפֵט), again indicates that Moses' ability to apply his wisdom to legal matters is at issue in this scene.

Additionally, episode 2 provides another example of Moses' defense of solidarity among Hebrew/Israelite males, thereby continuing the development of this theme first introduced in the preceding episode. By mediating a quarrel between two kinsmen, Moses is portrayed as a defender of in-group cohesion. Moses' word choice in his attempt to adjudicate between the men, referring to the men as companions (רֵעַ), contributes to this portrayal. As Clines shows, the term רֵעַ is one frequently used in the description of the Israelite community of adult men.²¹ By using this term, Moses positions himself as an Israelite man, committed to the manly solidarity that resides at the heart of the group's sense of masculinity.

The coming-of-age theme in this episode and in the scene as a whole also appears in the guilty Hebrew's objection to Moses' display of judicial authority: מִי שֹׁפֵט (v. 14). Some commentators assume that the phrase אִישׁ שֹׁר should

²⁰ See Gordon F. Davies, *Israel in Egypt: Reading Exodus 1-2* (JSOTSup 135; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 133-34. See also Childs (*Book of Exodus*, 30) and Sarna (*Exodus*, 11).

²¹ See Clines, "Being a Man in the Book of the Covenant," 4.

be read together, with the word **אִישׁ** in a relationship of apposition to **שָׂר**. This reading results in a translation similar to that of NRSV: “Who made you a ruler and a judge over us?”²² Other scholars propose an alternative translation in which **אִישׁ** is read as an independent term that is not in apposition with the following word **שָׂר**.²³ Seen from this perspective, the guilty Hebrew’s objection is translated “Who set you as a man, ruler, and judge over us?” (so Propp).²⁴ This translation is preferable because it shows how Moses’ authority is being challenged on three levels: his authority as a judge; as a leader; and, most significantly of all given its priority of placement at the head of the list, *as a man*.²⁵

The significance of the guilty Hebrew’s challenge to Moses for a coming-of-age reading of this text is readily apparent when this alternative translation is followed. The

²² For arguments in defense of this reading, see Childs (*Exodus*, 30) and Davies (*Israel in Egypt*, 119-22). See also the following translations, which provide minor variations but consistently translate the phrase **אִישׁ שָׂר** with one word in English: KJV, NAS, NJPS, NIV, ESV, NJB.

²³ Scholars who advocate for this reading include: Alan D. Crown (“An Alternative Meaning for **אִישׁ** in the Old Testament,” *VT* 24 [1974]: 111); Durham (*Exodus*, 18); and Propp (*Exodus 1-18*, 4). Crown’s article argues for viewing **אִישׁ** independently, however he contends that this term should occasionally be understood to imply “leader” or “king.” I follow Crown’s translation of **אִישׁ** as an independent term from **שָׂר**, but in my judgment **אִישׁ** should be taken at its most basic meaning: “man.” Durham opts to translate the phrase **אִישׁ שָׂר** as “man-prince,” representing a middle position between those arguing for apposition and those advocating the independence of the terms.

²⁴ See Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 4. Despite Propp’s translation, he does not consider its exegetical implications.

²⁵ Again, rabbinic interpreters seem to have recognized the importance of adult manhood to this objection. See *Exod. Rab.* 1.35 and *Yalkut Shimoni* 1:167, quoting *Midrash ’Avkir* (cited by Zivotofsky, “Leadership,” 261). Here the rabbis speculate that the crux of the Hebrew’s objection was that Moses was too young to be a judge.

young man Moses' authority and status as a man is questioned by the guilty Hebrew's challenge, which suggests that it is Moses' authority and status as a man that is a primary concern of the narrative. The text's position in response to this challenge is also evident: by placing the challenge in the mouth of a character who is called "guilty" (רָשָׁע) and who clearly prefigures the grumbling and insubordinate Israelites that Moses would lead in the wilderness, the text takes its stand in opposition to the challenge.²⁶ Moses, in other words, should be invested with the authority of a judge, a ruler, and most importantly, a man.²⁷ Furthermore, his status as a man is validated by his masculine deeds enacted throughout Exod 2:11-22.

In summary, the second episode in the scene depicting Moses' transition into manhood (Exod 2:11-22) highlights his maturation in the same way as does the first episode: by ascribing to him qualities associated with masculinity. Here those qualities include wisdom (specifically juridical wisdom) and, as also seen in the preceding episode, a commitment to the solidarity of adult male Hebrews/Israelites. His

²⁶ See Fretheim (*Exodus*, 44), who recognizes how the guilty Hebrew functions to foreshadow the rebellious Israel in the wilderness.

²⁷ For this reason, interpretations of the episode claiming that Moses is rightly criticized for over-stepping his authority (e.g., DiPalma, "De/Constructing," 43-44; Davies, *Israel in Egypt*, 133-37; Butler, "Anti-Moses," 10) are mistaken. If this were the text's intention, why would the valid objection to Moses' presumptuousness be articulated by a character that the audience is led to distrust from the moment of his introduction because of his "guilt" (רָשָׁע) and abuse of a fellow Hebrew?

demonstration of these qualities, however, is challenged by a fellow Hebrew “man” (שׂוֹרֵר; v. 13), who questions his status and authority as judge, ruler, and most significantly *as a man*. This challenge to Moses’ budding manhood again emphasizes that his transition to manhood is a central concern in the larger narrative. The fact that this challenge is voiced by an unsympathetic “guilty” (עֲשָׂרָה) character indicates the narrator’s position on this vital question: the recalcitrant Hebrew is wrong to question Moses, who through his actions in scene II (Exod 2:11-22) shows that he has become a man.

4.1.1.3 Episode 3 (vv. 15b-22): Moses defends Reuel’s daughters and marries

The third and final episode in Moses’ coming-of-age story is found in vv. 15b-22. After challenging Moses’ status as a man, the Hebrew antagonist reveals that he, and presumably others, knows that Moses has killed an Egyptian (v. 14). When Pharaoh too learns of this deed (v. 15a), fearing for his life Moses flees into the wilderness and settles in Midian (v. 15b).

Before considering how this episode contributes to the description of Moses’ maturation as a man, the “fear” that motivates him to leave Egypt (v. 14) raises a critical question that must be addressed.²⁸ Does Moses’ fear—a quality typically associated with

²⁸ DiPalma (“De/Constructing Masculinity,” 43) claims that Moses’ fear of punishment stands as a critique of the link between masculinity and violence. His point is premised, however, on the belief that Moses’ action

childhood—contradict my reading of Exod 2:11-22 as a coming-of-age narrative? A convincing solution to this query emerges as the result of the discussion in chapter 2 of fear as a characteristic of boyhood. There I argued in light of the story of Jether in Judg 8 and of the frightened Philistines in 1 Sam 4 that the kind of fear identified as non-manly is the fear to act, specifically the fear of fighting and killing in battle.²⁹ On the other hand, the fear of *being killed* may not represent the manly ideal; however, it does not disqualify one from being considered as a man. For example, Gideon is frequently identified as fearful (e.g., Judg 6:27; 7:10), yet he is still considered a mighty man of valor (גִּבּוֹר; Judg 6:12).³⁰

Moses' fear is clearly of the latter variety—the fear of being killed rather than the fear of killing. Moses has shown the willingness to use deadly force in defense of his kinsmen (vv. 11-12). His fear is a response to the wrath of Pharaoh who seeks to kill him for this deed (v. 15a). Therefore, Moses' "fear" in v. 14 is not an expression of a childish emotion that would detract from the depiction of Moses performing manly deeds to demonstrate his transition to adulthood.

of retaliation against the Egyptian is condemned by the narrator, a reading called into question above, 248 n. 18.

²⁹ See chapter 2, 62-63, 110-13, 156 n. 200.

³⁰ See chapter 5, 294.

Following Moses's arrival in Midian, he performs two deeds characteristic of biblical masculinity. First, he shows courage by "saving" (יָשַׁע) Reuel's daughters from the shepherds who are harassing them and who are driving the women away from a well.³¹ Witnessing this injustice, Moses rises up, confronts the hostile shepherds, and intervenes on behalf of Reuel's daughters.³² Following his courageous act, in an extra act of kindness, he then waters the women's sheep (vv. 16-17).

After the daughters' report Moses' kind deed to their father, Reuel invites Moses to dwell with him and his family. This invitation leads to Moses' second characteristically masculine deed in this episode: marriage, specifically to one of Reuel's daughters, Zipporah (v. 21). As argued previously, marriage often represents the

³¹ Whether or not Moses' intervention involved the use of physical force, his actions show a fearlessness in the face of potential harm from other men that is characteristically masculine. See chapter 2, 61-67, 156 n. 200. Additionally, Chapman's study of the visual representation of war in Assyrian reliefs illuminates the importance of the defense of women to ancient Near Eastern masculinity (*Gendered Language*, 32).

³² The story of a male hero meeting his future wife at a well reflects a narrative betrothal type-scene in the Hebrew Bible; see, e.g., Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 61-69. The story in Exod 2 is especially similar to that in Gen 29, where Jacob encounters Rachel. While Gen 29 may provide a model for this scene (see Davies [*Israel in Egypt*, 148] and John Van Seters, *The Life of Moses: The Yahwist as Historian in Exodus-Numbers* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994], 31-32), it significantly differs from Exod 2 in that it is apparently not influenced by the coming-of-age theme.

In fact, the Jacob cycle as a whole does not contain any narratives that obviously reflect the main character's coming-of-age. Jacob is referred to as a man (אִישׁ) from the beginning of his adult adventures (Gen 25:27, a verse immediately following the report of his birth and prior to the story of him acquiring Esau's birthright in exchange for food). While it can be argued that Jacob does not fully embody hegemonic biblical masculinity until his transformative experience at the Jabbok in Gen 32, his advanced age, marital status, and fathering of several children before this scene militate against this story being considered his coming-of-age narrative.

culmination of the masculine maturation process in the HB. Therefore, with his marriage and the birth of his first child—a male heir named Gershom (v. 22)—Moses completes his coming-of-age. Appropriately, it is in this final episode that the narrator refers to Moses unequivocally as a man (vv. 19, 20).

To summarize: This discussion of Moses' coming-of-age story first identified certain broad thematic and structural features of the text that suggest the coming-of-age theme. These features include the bifurcation of the larger narrative block of Exod 2 into two distinct scenes: the first describing Moses' infancy, in which יָלַד serves as a *Leitwort*; and the second depicting his transition to manhood, in which נָשָׂא functions as a *Leitwort*. The scenes are linked in verses 10-11, where the verb גָּדַל is repeated. This verb underscores the importance of growth in verse 10 and in verse 11 provides an apt title for the second scene: "In those days Moses grew up." Furthermore, scene I is female-dominated, whereas scene II is male-centric, thus signifying the transition from the female world to the male world, a transition that is characteristic of maturation from boyhood to manhood in the HB.

The three episodes of the second scene also contribute to the description of Moses' coming-of-age. Each episode shows Moses engaging in acts characteristic of manhood in the HB. In the first, Moses displays physical strength by defeating/slaying

another man. In addition, Moses shows his solidarity with his Hebrew brethren (יְהוּדִים; v. 11). In the second episode, Moses displays both wisdom and, once again, solidarity with his fellow Hebrews/Israelites. Finally, Moses' maturation as a man (אִישׁ; see v. 19, 20) is completed in the third episode when Moses courageously defends Reuel's daughters, marries Zipporah, and fathers a son.

These characteristics of masculinity in Exod 2, moreover, are consistently viewed through the lens of the coming-of-age theme. Hints within the episodes as well as literary tactics and structural features establish the centrality of this theme. Moses undertakes his violent retribution against the Egyptian because "there was no man" present who could take this responsibility upon himself. Since there was no man, the narrator implies, Moses had to become that man. In addition, the guilty Hebrew's challenge of Moses' manhood draws attention to precisely the question of his status as a man, a question to which the scene from vv. 11-22 provides the answer, announcing that Moses has become a man. Having transitioned from boyhood to manhood, Moses is now ready to receive his vocation from Yhwh in the prophetic call narrative in the next chapters, Exod 3-4.

4.2 “And the Boy Samuel Grew with Yhwh:” The Coming-of-Age of Samuel in 1 Sam 3

Uniquely among the coming-of-age tales in the HB examined in this study, 1 Sam 3—detailing Yhwh’s revelation to Samuel at the Shiloh sanctuary—has previously been identified by a number of scholars as a story of maturation. Brueggemann, for instance, contends that “by the end of the narrative, Samuel arrives at manhood.”³³ McCarter similarly claims that the story in 1 Sam 3 serves as a conclusion to Samuel’s childhood narrative in 1 Sam 1-3.³⁴ However, the analysis here will go beyond the simple identification of 1 Sam 3 as a coming-of-age story and will show the literary devices used to focus the narrative on the coming-of-age theme. These narrative features include the repeated initial emphasis upon Samuel’s youth and the use of narrative structure and threefold repetition to highlight Samuel’s transition out of boyhood. Further evidence of the theme’s significance becomes apparent when 1 Sam 3 is read in the

³³ Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel* (IBC; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990), 23.

³⁴ McCarter (*I Samuel*, 100). See also Bruce B. Birch (“The Books of First and Second Samuel: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections,” *NIB* 2: 993), who claims that at the conclusion of 1 Sam 3 “Samuel has grown to adulthood.” Hans Wilhelm Herzberg argues that “the closing verses [of 1 Sam 3] describe [Samuel’s] growth to manhood” (*I & II Samuel: A Commentary* [OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964], 42); and R. W. L. Moberly asserts that Josephus’s reckoning of Samuel’s age as 12 in 1 Sam 3 (see *AJ* V.10.4) is appropriate given that this is the traditional age of *bar mitzvah*. Just as in the *bar mitzvah* ceremony, the events in 1 Sam 3 effect “the transition...from a child’s to an adult’s standing before God,” in Moberly’s judgment (“To Hear the Master’s Voice: Revelation and Spiritual Discernment in the Call of Samuel,” *SJT* 48 [1995]: 459 n. 40).

broader context of 1 Sam 1-3.³⁵ The analysis of Samuel's coming-of-age narrative in this section concludes with a consideration of the changes that occur in Samuel by the end of 1 Sam 3.

4.2.1 Emphasis on Samuel's Youth

The first indication that 1 Sam 3 entails Samuel's coming-of-age is that until this point in the narrative Samuel is depicted as a child.³⁶ Indeed, his youth is emphasized repeatedly throughout 1 Sam 1-3. To begin with, the term נָעַר is used for Samuel more

³⁵ Scholars are divided on the unity of composition in 1 Sam 1-3. On one end of the spectrum is John T. Willis ("An Anti-Elide Narrative Tradition from a Prophetic Circle at the Ramah Sanctuary," *JBL* 90 [1971], 288-308; see also "Samuel versus Eli: 1 Samuel 1-7," *TZ* 35 [1979]: 204-5), who argues for the overall unity not only of 1 Sam 1-3 but also for all of the first seven chapters of 1 Sam. Willis' position contradicts the majority viewpoint that sees 1 Sam 4-6; 2 Sam 6 as a composition independent of the rest of 1-2 Sam, which has been known since Leonhard Rost's time as the "Ark Narrative." Patrick D. Miller and J. J. M. Roberts, on the other hand, view 1 Sam 1-3 as consisting of two originally separate sources, one concerned with story of Eli and the other with the rise to prominence of the young Samuel (*The Hand of the Lord: A Reassessment of the 'Ark Narrative' of 1 Samuel* [JHNES; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977], 114). For Miller and Roberts, the Elide material originally served as the introduction to the Ark Narrative that was only later edited together with the Samuel materials, and the many references to Samuel within the Elide materials in 1 Sam 2:12-36 are the creation of an editor who brought these disparate sources together. For a detailed discussion of the contours of the debate on the unity of 1 Sam 1-3 and its relationship to the Ark Narrative, see Robert Karl Gnuse, "The Dream Theophany of Samuel: Its Structure in Relation to Ancient Near Eastern Dreams and Its Theological Significance" (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 1980), 268-82. For a more recent discussion, see Erik Eynikel, "The Relation between the Eli Narrative and the Ark Narratives," in *Past, Present, Future: The Deuteronomistic History and the Prophets* (ed. Johannes C. de Moor and Herrie F. Van Rooy; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 88-106. The reading offered below of 1 Sam 3 as a coming-of-age story is not dependent upon any particular position regarding the source history behind 1 Sam 1-3, with the exception of what Gnuse recognizes as the scholarly consensus that 1 Sam 3 is a compositional unity and is from the same hand that included the many references to Samuel interspersed throughout the Elide materials ("Dream Theophany," 274-75).

³⁶ An extensive discussion along these lines was unnecessary in the case of Moses, who is clearly represented as an infant in scene I (Exod 2:1-10).

than any other named character in the entire HB.³⁷ The extent of Samuel's association with the term **נֶעַר** is further indicated by the anomalous way in which the word is occasionally applied to him. In contrast to every other character in the HB to whom **נֶעַר** refers, only Samuel is identified with the designation **הַנֶּעַר** immediately *preceding* his name (i.e., he is called **הַנֶּעַר שְׁמוּאֵל** in 1 Sam 2:21, 26, and 3:1), while in every other instance in which a person is named and is identified as a **נֶעַר**, the term will *follow* the person's name.³⁸ Referring to Samuel as **הַנֶּעַר שְׁמוּאֵל** functions to provide a veritable title for the character: he is "the boy Samuel," just as, for example, David is "the king David." The placement of the title **הַנֶּעַר** before Samuel's name is especially noteworthy because the Hebrew of the Deuteronomistic History tends not to vary in the placement of a character's titles. Kings are by far more frequently referred to as "the king PN" than "PN

³⁷ See 1 Sam 1:22, 24 (2x), 25, 27; 2:11, 18, 21, 26; 3:1, 8. The only other character who is referred to as a **נֶעַר** more than Samuel (twelve times versus Samuel's eleven) is Jonathan's unnamed assistant in 1 Sam 20. Moreover, it is important to mention that in each instance of the term's use to denote Samuel, a life-cycle meaning ("boy") is the most appropriate translation of this multivalent term. See NRSV, NJPS, NAS, NIV, KJV, etc., each of which unanimously renders **נֶעַר** as "boy," "child," or similar terms connoting youth when used in reference to Samuel. Alternative definitions such as "servant" do not fit the context. For example, one could hardly imagine Hannah presenting the newly weaned babe Samuel to Eli with the words "This is the servant that I prayed for" (1 Sam 1:27a).

³⁸ Cf. the more common ways in which the term **נֶעַר** is used to describe other characters: (1) the word may be used independently of the referent's name to designate him (e.g., Ishmael in Gen 21:17, 18; where the messenger of Yhwh calls him simply **הַנֶּעַר** without any mention of his name); and (2) the term may follow a person's name (hereafter "PN"), either on its own (e.g. Joshua's appellation as "Joshua ben Nun, a lad/servant" [יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן־נֹון נֶעַר] Exod 33:11), or in construct relationship with another PN indicating ownership (thus "Ziba the servant of Saul" [צִיבָא נֶעַר שָׁאוּל], 2 Sam 9:9).

the king.” David, for instance, is called “David the king” only once, in 2 Sam 13:39, with scores of other references to him as “the king David” (e.g. 2 Sam 6:12, 16; 8:8, 10, 11, etc.). Prophets are unanimously called “PN the prophet” rather than “the prophet PN” (e.g., Gad [1 Sam 22:5; 2 Sam 24:11]).³⁹ To alter the convention of placing הַנָּבִיא after a character’s name as is the case with Samuel, therefore, is a relatively rare occurrence that indicates the narrator’s emphasis on Samuel’s youth.

Perhaps nowhere is the emphasis on Samuel’s youth more obvious than in 1 Sam 1:24. While the text of the MT may suffer from corruption here, this verse as it currently reads highlights Samuel’s youth with an almost comedic tenacity.⁴⁰ Here Hannah brings

³⁹ See also Nathan (2 Sam 7:2; 12:25; 1 Kgs 1:8, 10, 22, 23, 32, 34, 38, 44, 45), Ahijah (1 Kgs 11:29; 14:2, 18), Jehu ben Hanani (1 Kgs 16:7, 12), Elijah (1 Kgs 18:36), Elisha (2 Kgs 6:12; 9:1), and Isaiah (2 Kgs 19:2; 20:1, 11, 14), all of whom are referred to as “PN the prophet” rather than “the prophet PN.”

⁴⁰ LXX^B and 4QSam^a differ significantly from the MT in v. 24. The MT at 1:24-25 reads “She brought him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh; and the child was young. Then they slaughtered the bull, and she brought the child to Eli.” (so NRSV). LXX, in contrast, here reads: “And she came to the house of Yahweh in Shiloh, and the child was with them. And they went before Yahweh, and his father slaughtered the sacrifice as he did regularly to Yahweh. And she took the child, and he slaughtered the calf. And Hannah, the mother of the child, went to Eli” (translation McCarter, *I Samuel*, 57). McCarter (ibid.), wishing to explain away what he finds to be the awkward phrasing at the end of 1:24 in MT, argues that the MT originally more resembled the LXX, but now it contains a haplography resulting from homoioteleuton when it was transcribed from the *Vorlage* of the LXX—which he reconstructs. However, many scholars find the MT perfectly comprehensible and view McCarter’s reconstruction of the *Vorlage* artificial and overly speculative. These include: Herzberg (*I & II Samuel*, 27); Campbell (*1 Samuel*, 38); Pisano (*Additions or Omissions*, 157-63); and David Toshio Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2007), 131. See also Carol Meyers (“Hannah and Her Sacrifice: Reclaiming Female Agency,” in *A Feminist Companion to Samuel and Kings* [ed. Athalya Brenner; FCB 5; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994], 100-101), who argues that the MT is preferable because it highlights Hannah’s agency in the sacrifice of 1 Sam 1:24 and therefore reflects an earlier time in the history of Israel’s religion when women had a more active role in

Samuel to Eli at Shiloh for the first time, along with several items to be sacrificed at the shrine. The text refers to Samuel's presence alongside his mother with a curious tautology: "and the child was young" (וְהַנֶּעַר נָעַר); literally "and the boy was a boy"—an expression that again draws special attention to Samuel's youth.⁴¹

Other indicators of Samuel's youth are apparent in 1 Sam 1-3. Repeated references to his weaning in 1 Sam 1 (vv. 22, 23, 24) as well as the mention of the "little robe" (מָעִיל קָטָן) Hannah makes and gives to Samuel each year he is at Shiloh (2:19) are examples of the emphasis on his youth prior to the Shiloh theophany in 1 Sam 3. Even within 1 Sam 3 itself—the specific pericope I identify as Samuel's coming-of-age—subtle indicators of Samuel's youth are evident. For example, upon hearing Yhwh's judgment against Eli's house, Samuel is afraid to report the pronouncement to Eli (3:15). Furthermore, he only reveals the message to Eli when the older priest exerts his authority, adjuring Samuel with an oath that forces him to disclose the prophecy (3:17). Samuel's reluctance to assert himself, together with his submission to the authority of

cultic and ceremonial practices. The LXX and 4QSam^a altered the MT to remove Hannah's agency in the sacrifice to have the text reflect the limited cultic participation of women in later times.

⁴¹ For a detailed defense of the coherence of the MT here, and the intelligibility of this clause, see Pisano, *Additions or Omissions*, 157-63.

his elder, reflects characteristics regularly associated with children in the HB.⁴² Samuel's youth is further highlighted by his initial misidentification of Yhwh's voice, thinking it instead to be Eli's (vv. 5, 6, 8). According to Moberly, the mistake points to Samuel's youth because it reflects the early stages of a child's development, in which a parent or teacher stands *in loco Dei* until the child matures enough to distinguish God's "voice" from that of his or her elder.⁴³

In sum, Samuel's youth is apparent throughout the "childhood narrative" in 1 Sam 1-3. He is referred to as a נַעַר until 3:8 and acts in a manner characteristic of children until 3:18 (where he is compelled to disclose Yhwh's revelation to Eli), suggesting that until this point in the narrative he is still reckoned as a boy.

4.2.2 Highlighting Samuel's Coming-of-age through Narrative Structure and Repetition

Although 1 Sam 1-3 repeatedly portrays Samuel as a callow boy, several literary features point to the young boy's growth throughout his "childhood narrative." The first feature is the structure of the second half of the narrative—i.e., that portion of the text

⁴² See chapter 2, 110-13. Samuel's fear to speak because of his lack of social power compared to his elder Eli is analogous to Jether's fear to act in battle because of his physical weakness and emotional fortitude in comparison to the veteran warriors around him.

⁴³ Moberly, "Master's Voice," 459-60.

following Hannah's prayer in 2:1-10 until the childhood narrative's conclusion in 4:1a.⁴⁴

This textual block contains distinct scenes separated by six parallel reports detailing

Samuel's growth and service at Shiloh.⁴⁵ This structure can be represented as follows:

Report 1 (2:11b): "The boy (הַנֶּעֶר) ministered (מְשָׁרֵת) to Yhwh before Eli the priest"

Scene 1 (2:12-17): The sins of Eli's sons

Report 2 (2:18): "Samuel was ministering (מְשָׁרֵת) to Yhwh, a boy (נֶעֶר) clad in a linen ephod"

Scene 2 (2:19-21a): Hannah and Elkanah make regular visits to Samuel, and Eli blesses them.

Report 3 (2:21b): "The boy Samuel (הַנֶּעֶר שְׁמוּאֵל) grew (גָּדַל) with Yhwh"

Scene 3 (2:22-25): Eli confronts his sons

Report 4 (2:26): "The boy Samuel (הַנֶּעֶר שְׁמוּאֵל) kept growing (גָּדַל) and was in favor with both Yhwh and men"

Scene 4 (2:27-36): A man of God pronounces judgment on Eli's house

⁴⁴ Most scholars end 1 Sam 3 at 1 Sam 4:1a. See, e.g., McCarter (*1 Samuel*, 97-103) and Campbell (*1 Samuel*, 52).

⁴⁵ While this structural feature of the text is noted by several commentators, no one discusses it with more depth than Campbell (*ibid.*, 47-49) and Tsumura (*First Book of Samuel*, 132). Tsumura differs from the popular reading, which identifies six reports, and instead argues for seven reports. According to his formulation, 1:24 is Report 1, and Scene 1 consists primarily of Samuel's arrival at Shiloh and Hannah's prayer. Each of the subsequent reports then shifts one place. Report 6, the concluding report, becomes Report 7 in this template. While Tsumura offers an attractive alternative, the vocabulary similarities shared by the six generally recognized reports, as well as their clear structural purpose demarcating scene breaks, are not as evident in 1:24. Consequently, lacking any reference to Samuel's growth or ministry, 1:24 should not be viewed as the initial report.

Report 5 (3:1a): “And the boy Samuel (הַנֶּעֶר שְׁמוּאֵל) was ministering to (מְשָׁרֵת) Yhwh before Eli”

Scene 5 (3:2-18): Yhwh’s theophany to Samuel at Shiloh

Report 6 (3:19): “And Samuel grew (גָּדַל) and Yhwh was with him, and he did not let any of [Samuel’s]⁴⁶ words fall to the ground.”

Scene 6 (3:20-4:1a): Summary of Samuel’s recognition as a prophet and man.

The shared traits of the six reports accentuate their structural importance in the narrative. Not only does a comparison reveal the careful literary artistry of the text’s final form, but it also highlights the progression of the six reports that matches the development and maturation of Samuel.

First, and most important, each of the first five structuring reports describes Samuel as a boy/נֶעֶר: in the first he is only “the boy”; the second gives the name Samuel but adds the term נֶעֶר when providing more information about him; and the third through the fifth call him “the boy Samuel.” However, in the sixth report following the

⁴⁶ This interpretation is favored by McCarter (*I Samuel*, 99), Gnuse (“Dream Theophany,” 164), Gordon (*I & II Samuel*, 91), and Birch (“First and Second Books of Samuel,” 993). Rather than Yhwh’s words, Samuel’s words are not allowed to fall to the ground. Even though the referent of דִּבְרָיו is unclear, it is doubtful that the subject of the verb and the referent of the 3ms suffix in this clause, which is clear in the preceding clause (Yhwh is the subject, Samuel the referent of the 3ms suffix), would change in the following clause without indication by the narrator. For a contrary opinion, see Klein (*1 Samuel*, 30) and Hans Joachim Stoebe (*Das Erste Buch Samuelis* [KAT 8/1; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1973], 126).

Shiloh theophany, the term נַעַר is no longer used in conjunction with Samuel's name.

Here he is no longer "the boy," or even "the boy Samuel," but is simply "Samuel."

Moreover, this terminological transition is permanent in that Samuel is never referred to as a boy again after this point. This suggests that a significant change has taken place in Samuel in the scene that separates the fifth and the sixth report—the scene narrating Samuel's first prophetic revelation at Shiloh (1 Sam 3:2-18). This change renders the term נַעַר now inappropriate.

The importance of threefold repetition in these reports, a technique common in biblical literature to signify completion, is also significant.⁴⁷ Three times Samuel is said to have served Yhwh as a priest (מִשְׁרֵת), and three times he is described as growing (גָּדַל).⁴⁸ The reports that reference Samuel's priestly ministry at Shiloh are reports 1, 2 and 5; and those that emphasize his growth are reports 3, 4 and 6. If A represents reports of Samuel's ministry and B signifies his growth, an ABBAB structure emerges. Moreover, the third and final reports of Samuel's ministry and growth, in 3:1a and 3:19

⁴⁷ See K. M. Beyse ("שָׁלֵשׁ," *TDOT* 5: 124), who notes the prevalence of the threefold repetition of actions as a narrative motif in biblical literature.

⁴⁸ McCarter (*I Samuel*, 82) argues that the participle מִשְׁרֵת when used in this context connotes priestly activity (see also K. Engelken, "שֵׁרֵת," *TDOT* 5: 507). Taken together with the reports of Samuel wearing an ephod (2:18), it is apparent that Samuel is being described as a priest.

respectively, bookend a pericope in which a threefold repetition is also present in the form of the three calls to Samuel before he is able to recognize Yhwh's voice (3:4, 6, 8).

The rhetorical strategy of threefold repetition in this section of the narrative signals the culmination of three separate acts. The third call of Yhwh in v. 8 finally alerts Eli to the presence of the deity beckoning Samuel. The third reports of both Samuel's ministry (3:1) and growth (3:19) that border this scene in Shiloh represent the final accomplishment of these respective processes. Samuel's priestly service at Shiloh is mentioned in 3:1 and is completed when he is called to be a prophet in the ensuing narrative.⁴⁹ So too, the report of Samuel's growth in 3:19 marks the conclusion and culmination of his growth.⁵⁰ In other words, the rhetorical strategy of threefold

⁴⁹ This is not to argue that Samuel no longer functions in the role of priest after this point. Indeed, he continues the priestly activity of offering sacrifices on behalf of the people throughout the following narrative (see, e.g., 1 Sam 7:9-10). The third report of Samuel's priestly ministry instead marks the completion of his priestly service at Shiloh. After this point, Samuel's role at Shiloh is more prophetic than priestly since Yhwh appears to him there (3:21).

⁵⁰ Note that the use of the verb גדל in 3:19 can best be translated with the English "to grow up," but this is not the usual meaning of the verb. Most often, the English "to grow" more accurately reflects the meaning of the verb, and does so when describing Samuel prior to 3:19 (2:21, 26), despite McCarter's translation of גדל in 2:21 as "grew up" (McCarter, *I Samuel*, 77). In English, "to grow up" suggests a completed process—the final transition from childhood to adulthood—while "to grow" simply denotes physical development. On one hand, since Samuel is said to גדל in 2:21b, and is later still referred to as a boy (נער; see 2:26; 3:1, 8), translating the verb as "grow up" in 2:21, 26 is inappropriate. In 3:19, on the other hand, the context dictates that here גדל may rightly be translated as "grow up" because it serves as the third repetition of the verb in the parallel reports, marking the completion of the growth process. See also the discussion of the use of גדל in Exod 2:11 above (241 n. 6), as well as in the Samson cycle (see chapter 5, 302).

repetition in these structuring reports functions to highlight both Samuel's inauguration as a prophet and—more importantly for our purposes—his transition to manhood.

Therefore, the most obvious structural feature of the second half of Samuel's childhood narrative (1 Sam 2:11-4:1a)—the presence of six similar narrative reports dividing the overall story into six scenes—serves to emphasize the theme of young Samuel's maturation. While each of the first five of these reports refers to Samuel as a boy, the sixth report no longer employs this terminology. Finally, in light of the significance of threefold repetition to the story, the fact that the third and culminating notice of Samuel's growth occurs in the final report indicates that by the story's end Samuel has completed his growth and is no longer properly referred to as a boy/נער.

4.2.3 Samuel's Coming-of-Age in the Context of 1 Sam 1-3: A Comparison with Eli's Sons

A number of scholars have recognized the contrast between Samuel and Eli's wayward sons Hophni and Phinehas in 1 Sam 1-3.⁵¹ For example, the narrative reports identified above serve this purpose by interjecting positive comments about Samuel between scenes detailing the iniquities and injustices perpetrated by Eli's sons. In so

⁵¹ See e.g., McCarter (*1 Samuel*, 85), Campbell (*1 Samuel*, 47-49), and Klein (*1 Samuel*, 26).

doing, these reports draw attention to the significant differences between Samuel and Eli's sons.

The contrast is more complex than a simple juxtaposition of the "good" Samuel vs. the "evil" sons of Eli, however. Specific features of Hophni and Phinehas's characterization are brought into direct comparison with contrasting features of Samuel's portrayal. The sons of Eli, for instance, are criticized for not knowing (יָדַע) Yhwh in 1 Sam 2:12. In contrast, the narrative in 1 Sam 3 traces Samuel's progress beyond a similar lack of knowledge (יָדַע) of Yhwh (1 Sam 3:7) to the point when he becomes a prophet of Yhwh with special knowledge of the deity's ways and plans. Moreover, McCarter notes that the frequent mention of Samuel's priestly service (מִשְׁרָת; 2:11, 18; 3:1) as well as his priestly vestments (i.e., the linen ephod mentioned in 2:18) are meant to identify Samuel as a righteous priest strikingly different from the corrupt and sinful priests Hophni and Phinehas (cf. 1 Sam 1:3).⁵²

Scholars have failed to notice, however, the ways in which Samuel's growth and maturity factor into this comparison with Eli's sons. Given that the six narrative reports emphasize both Samuel's priestly ministry *and* his growth, it stands to reason that the latter trait would comprise as significant a portion of the comparison between Samuel

⁵² McCarter, *I Samuel*, 85.

and Eli's sons as does the former. In particular, this comparison portrays Samuel as an example of successful manly maturation as opposed to Eli's sons, whose transition to manhood is questioned (see below). In this way the narrator heralds the establishment of a new system of leadership under the prophet/priest/judge Samuel, and the atrophy and death of the old order under the Elides.

The incomplete and tenuous status of Hophni and Phinehas's maturation is seen in the tendency of the text to alternate qualities in depicting them, occasionally describing them in terms that imply manhood (e.g., they hold the office of priest [1:3] and are married [4:19-22]) but just as often attributing boyish qualities to them. Assuming with the majority of scholars that Hophni and Phinehas are the subject of condemnation in 2:17, this verse encapsulates the text's questioning of their adulthood.⁵³ Here, the narrative summarizes the corrupt practices of the Shiloh priesthood as follows:

⁵³ The central issue in the debate about the identity of the *אֲנָשִׁים* and *נְעָרִים* in 2:17 is whether the *נְעָרִים* in this verse are to be identified with the *נָעַר הַכֹּהֵן* mentioned in 2:13 and 15. Most believe these two uses of *נָעַר* refer to different characters—the *נָעַר הַכֹּהֵן* being a priest's servant and the *נְעָרִים* of v. 17 being Eli's sons (see, e.g., NRSV, NAS, NJPS, KJV—all of which translate *נָעַר הַכֹּהֵן* as "the priest's servant" but then translate *נְעָרִים* as "young men"). Tsumura's translation (*First Book of Samuel*, 157-8), however, allows for both the *נָעַר הַכֹּהֵן* and the *נְעָרִים* of v. 17 to refer to Eli's sons, since he translates *נָעַר הַכֹּהֵן* as "the young priest." McCarter also equates the *נְעָרִים* and the *נָעַר הַכֹּהֵן*, but he believes both refer to temple servants, not Eli's sons. Thus, he stands alone among commentators for asserting that 2:17 does not refer to Eli's sons at all. Unlike Tsumura's argument that equates the two expressions, McCarter's argument is unconvincing because it has no regard for the larger narrative context. It would be curious indeed for this section of the narrative (2:12-17) to be introduced with a statement about the evil of Eli's sons (referred to as *בְּנֵי בְלִיעַל* in 2:12) and then to proceed in the ensuing story to make no mention of them at all—and instead to criticize the temple servants.

“The sin of the young men (נְעָרִים) against the Lord was very great, for the men (אֲנָשִׁים) treated the Lord’s offerings impiously” (NJPS). In two consecutive clauses in one verse Eli’s sons are called both boys and men, a testament to the text’s equivocal estimation of their status as men.⁵⁴

The blurring of lines between boyhood and manhood is also evident in the description of Hophni and Phinehas’s sins. They are criticized for two misdeeds in particular: (1) their violation of the standard sacrificial practices by which the priests’ portion of the sacrificial meat would be selected (2:13-17);⁵⁵ and (2) their illicit sexual contact with female attendants assisting the sacrificial cult (2:22). The description of the former sin employs imagery that evokes childishness as depicted in the HB, particularly the impetuosity and potential for rash violence characteristic of boyhood.⁵⁶ This is evident in 2:16, where the request by a sacrificing worshipper first to burn fat to Yhwh

⁵⁴ LXX dispenses with the ambiguity in this verse by reckoning the young men/boys (παῖδαριον) as the subject of both clauses, thereby having no parallel to the MT אֲנָשִׁים. Again, presumably these youths are Eli’s sons; therefore LXX offers a less nuanced assessment of the two in 1 Sam 2:12-17, referring to them throughout the passage as boys. Thus, the contrast between the priests (1:3) who act like boys and Samuel, the boy who becomes a man (1 Sam 3), is even more starkly drawn in LXX. Additionally, 4Q Sam^a follows the LXX and reproduces none of the MT’s ambiguity.

⁵⁵ Reading with NJPS at 2:13-16 and *contra* NRSV. NJPS accepts that the “pot-luck” approach through which the priests would randomly select their portion of the sacrificed meat described in vv. 13-14 was the standard, and that Eli’s sons had altered it by taking whatever piece they wanted before the meat was boiled in a cauldron (v. 16). According to NRSV, both the “potluck” system and the direct confiscation of meat by the priests represented an alteration of the proper procedure.

⁵⁶ See chapter 2, 113-16, 124-25.

before the priests take their portion is met with a curt “No, you must give it now; if not I will take it by force.”⁵⁷ The second sin involves the direction of sexual energies outside of their proper function according to the Deuteronomist: the siring of legitimate (especially male) offspring.⁵⁸ By demonstrating no self-control over their sexual appetites—a self-control that is a fundamental feature of biblical manhood—the sons of Eli are subject to critique for being less than men and more like boys unable to control their impetuous nature.

Samuel stands in sharp contrast to this depiction of Hophni and Phinehas, self-serving priests who act like boys rather than men. As previously demonstrated, once Samuel comes of age in 1 Sam 3 the text is unambiguous about referring to him as a man. Moreover, the emphasis on Samuel’s growth, definitively achieved by 3:19, distinguishes him from the Elides whose maturation is questioned.

Therefore, alongside the evidence presented above for viewing 1 Sam 3 as a coming-of-age narrative, similarly convincing evidence can be identified by noting the role of Samuel’s coming-of-age in the extended comparison between him and Eli’s sons.

⁵⁷ Reading with Tsumura (*First Book of Samuel*, 152), who identifies the *נָעַר הַכֹּהֵן* mentioned in 2:13, 15 as “the young priest,” i.e., one of Eli’s sons.

⁵⁸ The Deuteronomic tradition views legitimate male offspring as essential to “perpetuating a name in Israel”—a vital task for Israelite men in this tradition. See the further discussion of this feature of Israelite masculinity in chapters 2, 82-84, and chapter 5, 303-5.

A full appreciation of this contrast is only possible through a reading the childhood narrative in light of the coming-of-age theme.

4.2.4 Changes to Samuel Marking his Maturation

The case for viewing 1 Sam 3 as a coming-of-age story is bolstered by three narrative features. First, Samuel is no longer referred to as a boy after 1 Sam 3. Second, the structural features of the narrative point to the importance of Samuel's growth. Third, the coming-of-age theme enhances—at least heuristically—the comparison between Samuel and Eli's sons. However, additional evidence must be mustered to show that 1 Sam 3 is a coming-of-age tale. Specifically, in a maturation story a noticeable change must take place in the boy in order to transform him into a man by the story's conclusion. For Samuel, two events contribute to his development in 1 Sam 3.

The most apparent difference between Samuel at the beginning of 1 Sam 3 and at the chapter's conclusion is that he has learned to recognize Yhwh's voice, or as it is called throughout the chapter, Yhwh's "word" (3:1, 7, 21). No longer does he mistake the call of the deity for that of his mentor Eli. In Moberly's view this signifies that Samuel has reached the point of spiritual maturation at which a youth is able to "perceive and

respond to God as God and as distinct from the parent/teacher.”⁵⁹ Discerning the word of Yhwh changes Samuel from one who did not “know the Lord” because that word had not yet been revealed to him (v. 7) to a “prophet of the Lord” (v. 20)—one to whom the word of Yhwh is revealed (v. 21).

Another change in Samuel in 1 Sam 3 is his transition from timidity to authority. Samuel’s fear of disclosing Yhwh’s word to the more authoritative Eli in 3:17 signals the character’s boyishness, as I have noted. However, Samuel overcomes his fear when he proclaims the word of Yhwh, which serves as his inaugural act as a prophet. The text indicates Samuel’s promotion to a position of authority by reporting in 3:19 that Yhwh let none of Samuel’s words “fall to the ground.” This statement highlights Samuel’s religious authority as a prophet, since its likely meaning is that Samuel’s predictions were never unfulfilled (so NJPS) and that he consequently passes the Deuteronomic test for a authentic prophet of Yhwh (Deut 18:21-22).⁶⁰ The next verse (v. 20) continues to stress Samuel’s religious authority, applying to him the title of a trustworthy (נִאֲמָן) prophet of Yhwh. The story concludes with a note on the purview of Samuel’s authority:

⁵⁹ Moberly, “Master’s Voice,” 459-60.

⁶⁰ See Gordon, *I & II Samuel*, 91. The explanation of the statement is McCarter’s (*I Samuel*, 99). Stoebe concurs (*Samuelis*, 122), with reference to evidence from Josh 21:45; 23:14; 1 Kgs 8:56; 2 Kgs 10:10.

his prophetic role is recognized from Dan to Beersheba (v. 20), and his “word” influences all of Israel (4:1a).

In narrating the progression of a male character from boyish fear to manly social power/authority, 1 Sam 3 functions as a coming-of-age narrative along the lines of those already discussed. Fear and lack of power (both physical and social) are characteristics of children in the HB as a whole, and Samuel’s progression from fear and powerlessness in 1 Sam 3 effectively signals the end of his boyhood.⁶¹ However, the other major change to Samuel in this story—that is, his new-found ability to discern Yhwh’s word—is distinctive from the coming-of-age narratives considered in chapter 3 and the first half of this chapter. No other boy character in biblical narrative changes in this way in his maturation into manhood. Furthermore, the ability to mediate Yhwh’s speech to humanity is not characteristic of manhood in general in the HB, nor is the inability to do so regularly stressed as typical of biblical boyhood.⁶²

The ability to discern Yhwh’s voice as a feature of the maturation process is understandable because 1 Sam 3 functions not only as the story of Samuel’s transition to

⁶¹ See chapter 2, 110-13.

⁶² Despite Moberly’s insightful reading of the story suggesting that recognizing God’s voice as distinctive from one’s parent or mentor’s voice is a marker of spiritual maturation (“Master’s Voice,” 459-60), this aspect of maturation is not explicitly found as a characteristic of manhood in the HB according to the study of the components of biblical masculinity in chapter 2.

manhood, but also as the story of his call to prophecy. In fact, as I will show below, 1 Sam 3 arguably can be identified as a prophetic call narrative, albeit one that also contains coming-of-age themes. While the ability to discern and mediate the deity's voice is not an essential element of biblical manhood, it is *the* defining characteristic of a prophet. Thus, in 1 Sam 3 Samuel's change into one who is uniquely able to communicate with Yhwh has more to do with his taking on the role of a prophet than with his maturation as a man. In short, 1 Sam 3 serves a double-duty role describing both a prophet's call and a boy's coming-of-age.

In sum, 1 Sam 3 narrates the transition of the boy Samuel into the man Samuel, the prophet of Yhwh. The youthful imagery and terminology found throughout the "childhood narrative" (1 Sam 1-3) is no longer employed after this chapter. The six parallel reports following Hannah's song in the childhood narrative (i.e., 1 Sam 2:11-4:1a) further highlight the importance of Samuel's growth in the story. In addition, the threefold repetition in the narrative reports signifies the culmination of Samuel's process of growth in the final report of v. 19. Finally, the dramatic change in Samuel from the timidity and powerlessness commonly associated with boyhood to a position of authority recognized by all Israel heralds Samuel's maturation and signifies that 1 Sam 3 is a coming-of-age story. The second change in Samuel in 1 Sam 3—Samuel's movement

from one who does not know Yhwh (3:7) to one who is able to discern Yhwh's voice—is unique to this story and does not rely upon the typical depictions of boyhood and manhood in the HB. This change in Samuel is best explained by the fact that 1 Sam 3 is also concerned with Samuel's inauguration as prophet.

4.3 Thematic Comparison of the Prophetic Coming-of-Age Narratives

To conclude this chapter, I begin by comparing the two stories of prophetic coming-of-age: that of Moses and Samuel. This comparison reveals more differences than similarities. I will then compare these prophetic coming-of-age narratives with the royal ones analyzed in the preceding chapter. I conclude by suggesting reasons for the congruities between the stories of prophetic and royal coming-of-age and considering what this comparison may contribute to the scholarship on biblical masculinity.

The most obvious similarity between the two stories of prophetic coming-of-age (that of Moses in Exod 2 and that of Samuel in 1 Sam 1-3) is that they have a common subject matter: the transition from boyhood to manhood of a future prophet and leader. Beyond this broad thematic congruity, the tactics the respective narratives employ to draw attention to the maturation theme are similar. Specifically, both Exod 2 and 1 Sam

1-3 use structural features and the repetition of *Leitworte* to indicate that maturation is a central theme of the narrative. In Exod 2, the narrative structure consists of two scenes that feature different *Leitworte*: יָלַד is repeated seven times in the first scene, while אִישׁ is repeated seven times in the second scene. Moreover, in the hinge between the two scenes in vv. 10-11, the verb גָּדַל (“to grow”) appears twice. The change of *Leitwort* between the two scenes and the emphasis on growth at the hinge point between the scenes highlights Moses’ transition from boyhood into manhood. Similarly, in 1 Sam 1-3, the narrative applies the term נָעַר repeatedly to describe Samuel in order to emphasize his initial youthfulness.⁶³ However, the threefold repetition of the verb גָּדַל in the narrative reports that structure the narrative into shorter scenes—as well as the absence of the term נָעַר in the sixth and final report—functions to indicate Samuel’s transition out of his boyhood.

⁶³ It is interesting to note that in Exod 2 the *Leitwort* stressing Moses’ youth is יָלַד, but in 1 Sam the word נָעַר functions in this way. The former term is used of younger boys from birth to approximately age twelve (see chapter 2, 119-22), therefore it is appropriately employed in scene I of Exod 2, in which Moses is an infant. The term נָעַר covers a wider age range (from before birth to approximately age twenty; see chapter 2, 107-9). This range is evident in the “childhood narrative” of 1 Sam 1-3 where נָעַר is used to describe Samuel as an infant who has not yet been weaned (1 Sam 1:22) and as an older boy on the verge of maturation (1 Sam 3:8). Note also that נָעַר is used once in reference to the infant Moses in Exod 2:6.

No satisfactory explanation can be provided for why the two narratives choose different *Leitworte* to denote youthfulness. However, since DtrH uses נָעַר more often than any other term to connote boyhood (seventy-five times with the definition “boy” vs. only twenty-six occurrences of יָלַד), it is possible that the choice of נָעַר as a *Leitwort* in 1 Sam 3 reflects DtrH’s general preference for this term.

The only other point of contact between the two narratives is that in both the transition out of boyhood entails a shift from a childlike position of social powerlessness to one of social power/authority. This theme is more pronounced with Samuel, whose timidity is initially emphasized (1 Sam 3:15) and then contrasted with his new authoritative status by the end of the narrative. A series of clauses in 1 Sam 3:19-20 highlight this authority. He has grown up (גָּדַל; v. 19), hence he possesses the authority that comes with manhood. Additionally, he is established as a trustworthy and *bona fide* (נָאֵם; v. 20) prophet whose religious authority extends throughout Israel.

While Samuel's authority as a man and prophet is explicitly proclaimed by the narrator in 1 Sam 3:19-20, for Moses the issue of authority is more implicit. When Moses' authority as a man, a political leader (שָׂר), and a judge (שֹׁפֵט) is challenged by the guilty Hebrew, the narrator never directly answers this critique. Nevertheless, the fact that this critique is voiced by a character whom the story's audience would view unsympathetically due to his "guilty status" (רָשָׁע) indicates that the narrator disapproves of this challenge. Moreover, Moses' display of distinctly manly qualities

(e.g., strength, solidarity with adult Hebrew men, wisdom) in the second scene of Exod 2 undermines the critique of his manhood.⁶⁴

The transition of a socially powerless boy to authoritative manhood along with narrative features that underscore the transformation process are shared by these two prophetic coming-of-age stories. Yet numerous thematic differences appear in specific details of the two narratives. To begin with, Moses displays qualities that are more typically associated with biblical masculinity, while also performing deeds that validate his manhood in ways that are more like those identified in other maturation stories. These include the use of violent force against another man (Exod 2:11-12); a commitment to the in-group solidarity of adult Israelite/Hebrew males (2:11-12, 13-15a); the demonstration of wisdom (2:13-14); and finally marriage and procreation (2:21-22). In contrast, the primary change to Samuel in 1 Sam 3—aside from the emphasis on his increased authority—is that he is able to discern the word of Yhwh. This ability is nowhere articulated as a typical feature of biblical manhood, but instead primarily characterizes a legitimate prophet.

⁶⁴ The critique of Moses' right to be a judge and political leader (the other two elements of the guilty Hebrew's challenge to Moses) is of less concern to Exod 2. However, it is the major theme of the subsequent scene in the Moses story: the call narrative at the burning bush in Exod 3-4, in which Moses' authority is granted to him directly by Yhwh.

The manner in which maturation is accomplished is another notable difference between the two stories. In Exod 2:11-22, Moses is a proactive character who demonstrates his manhood through his own bold actions, often in the face of antagonism by other men. Samuel, however, is a more passive figure who receives his status as man and prophet from Yhwh (a character conspicuously absent from Exod 2). Even in his most proactive moment, where he delivers his first prophetic oracle (1 Sam 3:17), Samuel acts only when compelled to by Eli. Additionally, while Moses' confrontations with other men prove his masculinity, Samuel's transition to manhood is peacefully facilitated by his older male mentor Eli. In short, Moses' coming-of-age reads as an *agon*, while Samuel's is an *idyll*.⁶⁵

Thus Exod 2 and 1 Sam 1-3 tell the story of a prophet's coming of age in markedly different ways. It is worth considering why this is the case. One likely explanation relates to their respective literary genres. Much has been written on the genre of 1 Sam 3, specifically on the question of whether it should be categorized as a prophetic call narrative.⁶⁶ Through a strict form-critical lens, the story should not be considered a prophetic call narrative because it does not conform exactly to the

⁶⁵ For the recognition of the idyllic nature of much of the childhood narrative of Samuel, see Brueggemann (*First and Second Samuel*, 25) and Gnuse ("Dream Theophany," 288).

⁶⁶ A thorough discussion of the debate on the question of genre in 1 Sam 3 can be found in Gnuse, "Dream Theophany," 188-201.

recognized elements of this *gattung*.⁶⁷ However, scholars like Savran and Simon have a different perspective. For them, form criticism entails an artificial imposition of certain rigid schemata onto literature (and especially narratives) in an effort to categorize traditions into genres.⁶⁸ Indeed, it is curious that a story like 1 Sam 3 in which a prophet encounters Yhwh for the first time and delivers a prophetic message is considered separately from other stories of a prophet's vocation. Whether or not 1 Sam 3 belongs to the call narrative genre, it is clearly concerned with both Samuel's inauguration as a prophet and his maturation as a man. For this reason, the description of the change in Samuel in 1 Sam 3 focuses on his acquisition of the characteristics of a prophet, and less so those of a man.

While 1 Sam 3 combines the story of Samuel's coming-of-age with that of his prophetic call, Exod 2 is concerned solely with Moses' transition to manhood. His prophetic vocation, of course, receives its own separate treatment in the call narrative in Exod 3-4. The genre most often invoked in reference to Exod 2, in contrast, is heroic folk

⁶⁷ For the classical articulation of the elements of the prophetic call narrative, see Norman C. Habel, "The Form and Significance of the Call Narratives," *ZAW* 77 (1965): 297-323.

⁶⁸ George Savran, "Theophany as Type Scene," *Proof* 23 (2003): 119-49; Uriel Simon, *Reading Prophetic Narratives* (trans. Lenn J. Schramm; Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1997), 51-72. See also Uriel Simon, "Samuel's Call to Prophecy: Form Criticism with Close Reading," *Proof* 1 (1981): 119-32. McCarter (*I Samuel*, 100), despite recognizing certain "formal distinctions" in 1 Sam 3, still refers to it as a prophetic call narrative and groups it together with Isa 6, Jer 1:4-10, and Ezek 1:1-3:16.

literature.⁶⁹ As Lord recognizes, stories belonging to the genre of heroic literature tend to “cluster around the ‘transitional’ points in a man’s life: his birth, his childhood or growing up, *his initiation into manhood*...[emphasis added].”⁷⁰ Since the genre to which Moses’ coming-of-age story belongs is more conducive to the coming-of-age theme than is Samuel’s maturation tale, that theme—with its focus on Moses’ transformation as a man—can take center stage in the heroic tale of Exod 2 in a way that it cannot in 1 Sam 3. As a result, the typical elements associated with the coming-of-age theme would naturally be stronger in Exod 2 than in 1 Sam 3.

⁶⁹ The case for viewing Exod 2 as a heroic folktale is based on the narrative’s incorporation of the theme of the “floating foundling” common to such stories, as most famously demonstrated in the birth narrative of Sargon. For a discussion, see, e.g., Meyers (*Exodus*, 43) and Propp (*Exodus 1-18*, 155-60). For an extensive discussion of the exposed infant motif in the ancient Near East, see the thirty-two examples cited by Donald B. Redford, “The Literary Motif of the Exposed Child,” *Numen* 14 (1967): 202-28. The argument for viewing this portion of the Moses story as a heroic saga is made most forcefully by George W. Coats (*Moses: Heroic Man, Man of God* [JSOTSup 57; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988]; cf. Coats, *Exodus 1-18*, 12-16, 27-28, 31-32). See also Hendel, *Epic of the Patriarch*, 133-65. For Moses as a typical example of the “heroic pattern,” see Baron Fitzroy Richard Somerset Raglan, *The Hero: A Study in Tradition, Myth and Drama* (London: Watts, 1949); repr. in *In Quest of the Hero* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 143.

⁷⁰ Albert B. Lord, “The Gospels as Oral Traditional Literature,” in *The Relationships Among the Gospels: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue* (ed. William O. Walker; San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1978), 40. Lord’s claim that the genre of hero stories often contains stories of initiation into manhood challenged former scholarship on this genre. None of the modern scholarly lists of the typical features of the hero pattern that preceded Lord (i.e., Lord Raglan’s in his *The Hero*, Joseph Campbell’s in his *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, and Otto Rank’s in his *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero*) mention coming-of-age in their studies. Both Raglan and Rank, for instance, assume that after the hero’s miraculous birth and precocious youth the next time he appears is after already becoming an adult (see Raglan, *The Hero*, 138; Otto Rank, *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero: A Psychological Interpretation of Mythology* [trans. F. Robbins and Smith Ely Jelliffe; New York: Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease Publishing Company, 1914]; repr. in *In Quest of the Hero*, 57). Campbell assumes that all myths adhere to a rite-of-passage schema (*Hero With a Thousand Faces*, 28-29), but never specifies that this rite is a coming-of-age rite.

Further insight is gained when these two narratives of prophetic coming-of-age are compared with the royal coming-of-age stories discussed in chapter 3. It is readily evident that Moses' coming-of-age in Exod 2 greatly resembles both that of David in 1 Sam 17 and Solomon in 1 Kgs 1-2. In addition, Samuel's coming-of-age in 1 Sam 3 displays some striking parallels to the alternative tale of Solomon's maturation in 1 Kgs 3.

Moses' coming-of-age narrative, like those of David and Solomon (in 1 Kgs 1-2), involves the use of bellicose force in demonstrating masculinity. When Moses slays the Egyptian in defense of his Hebrew kinsman, he provides validation of his transition from boyhood to manhood, just as David does when he defeats Goliath and Solomon does when he violently settles his father's scores. Additionally, marriage functions in each of these stories as the culminating act of the maturation process. Moses marries Zipporah at the end of Exod 2, while David wins his betrothal to Saul's daughter by defeating Goliath (1 Sam 17:25) and Solomon—according to the reading that identifies 1 Kgs 3:1 as the concluding verse of the narrative in 1 Kgs 1—marries Pharaoh's daughter at the end of his maturation tale. Finally, the closely-related masculine characteristics of kinship solidarity between adult males and collective honor likewise are woven into in

each story as a sign of manhood: Moses expresses his commitment to that solidarity in the first two episodes of his coming-of-age tale; David's defeat of Goliath is viewed as a defense of the honor of "the men of Israel" (17:2); and Solomon's actions in 1 Kgs 2 show his concern with issues of lineage and family honor.⁷¹

In the preceding chapter, I argued that the first story of Solomon's maturation (1 Kgs 1-2) contains many parallels to David's in 1 Sam 17 because of the retrospective tone of this passage, which has Solomon following in the footsteps of his father David. Moreover, the relationship between the Succession Narrative (to which 1 Kgs 1-2 belongs) and the History of David's Rise (to which 1 Sam 17 belongs) suggests that Solomon's coming-of-age narrative may have even been composed in imitation of David's. It is more difficult, however, to explain why these two texts contain so many similarities with the Moses maturation narrative. What might account for these thematic parallels?

One possibility involves genre. Like Exod 2, 1 Sam 17 likely began as heroic (probably oral) literature.⁷² The similarities in the way these stories apply the coming-of-age theme may therefore result from the influence of this shared genre on the respective

⁷¹ See the discussion of these features in chapter 3, 175, 210-12, 216

⁷² See chapter 3, 179-81.

narratives.⁷³ Another explanation for these thematic parallels is perhaps direct influence. As Coote and Ord, Coats, and Porter argue, the Moses traditions may have been synthesized and composed under the aegis of the royal court in Jerusalem and its royal ideology.⁷⁴ If, as Coote and Ord succinctly put it, “Moses is David,” then it is quite possible that the coming-of-age stories of these two figures would share many characteristics. The influence could arguably come from the Moses tradition to David’s (and subsequently Solomon’s) maturation tale, or vice versa; alternatively, mutual influence could account for these parallels.

Turning to the maturation tale of Samuel in 1 Sam 3 and that of Solomon in 1 Kgs 3, the similarities are immediately recognizable. The setting of the two scenes is practically identical: both take place at night in a shrine where the main character sleeps alone and Yhwh communicates with him. The only difference is the shrine’s location: Gibeon in the case of Solomon, and Shiloh for Samuel.⁷⁵ Furthermore, the manner in which the transition to manhood takes place is the same in the two narratives. In

⁷³ 1 Kgs 1-2 bears fewer markings of heroic literature. Arguably, its similarities with the themes of heroic literature have more to do with its imitation of the style of David’s maturation in 1 Sam 17.

⁷⁴ Robert B. Coote and David Robert Ord, *The Bible’s First History* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 234-35; Coats, *Heroic Man*, 198-99; Joshua R. Porter, *Moses and Monarchy: A Study in the Biblical Tradition of Moses* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963).

⁷⁵ Moreover, if Gnuse is correct in identifying 1 Sam 3 as an auditory message dream, then Yhwh’s chosen method for revelation to the main character (i.e., dreams) would also be identical in the two narratives. See Gnuse, “Dream Theophany,” 158-236; see also Gnuse, “A Reconsideration of the Form Critical Structure in 1 Samuel 3: An Ancient Near Eastern Dream Theophany,” *ZAW* 94 (1982): 379-90.

contrast to the maturation narratives of Moses, David, and the first report of Solomon's maturation in 1 Kgs 1-2—where the heroes strive to attain their status as men by demonstrating their masculinity—here the process is more passive. The status of both Samuel and Solomon as men is given to them by Yhwh. Qualities characteristic of manhood are neither displayed nor necessary. Yhwh guides Samuel's growth (1 Sam 2:21b) and ends his boyish social powerlessness by establishing and sustaining him in his office as prophet (3:19-4:1a), just as Yhwh bestows Solomon's manly authority upon him in an instant at Gibeon (1 Kgs 3:12-14). Finally, the use of violent/bellicose force is notably absent from both stories, which is perhaps the most significant difference between these two stories of maturation and those of Moses, David, and Solomon (in 1 Kgs 1-2).

Given the striking parallels between these two stories, it is worth considering that the similarities are not simply coincidental. If Gnuse, Bourke and Zannoni are correct in identifying 1 Sam 3 as a late monarchic and quite possibly Deuteronomistic text, this raises the intriguing possibility that both 1 Sam 3 and 1 Kgs 3 are composed, or at least heavily edited by the same hand: the Deuteronomistic historian (DtrH).⁷⁶ If so, the

⁷⁶ See Gnuse, "Dream Theophany," 289; Joseph Bourke, "Samuel and the Ark," *Dominican Studies* 7 (1954): 73-103; Arthur E. Zannoni, "An Investigation of the Call and Dedication of the Prophet Samuel: I Samuel

suggestion made in chapter 3 that DtrH is advocating for an alternative masculinity that is free of violent force would be strengthened. Furthermore, since many scholars argue that Samuel is intentionally cast in the mold of Moses, the coming-of-age narrative in 1 Sam 3 may then be another example of DtrH providing an alternative to a more violent maturation tale.⁷⁷ In other words, just as DtrH rewrote Solomon's coming-of-age tale in 1 Kgs 3 in order to offer an alternative view of masculinity from that in 1 Kgs 1-2, so too may DtrH have shaped the coming-of-age tale of the new Moses (Samuel) as a less violent alternative to Moses' coming-of-age in Exod 2.

Whatever the role of DtrH in the composition of these stories, it is clear that 1 Sam 3 and 1 Kgs 3 present coming-of-age in a very different way than the other three narratives with this theme (Exod 2; 1 Sam 17; 1 Kgs 1-3). Since the way a culture tells the story of a boy becoming a man is directly related to its views on manhood, these two maturation tales can be read as offering an alternative articulation of masculinity from

1:1-4:1a" (PhD diss., Marquette University, 1975), 153-60. For evidence of DtrH's influence upon 1 Kgs 3, see chapter 3, 234-36.

⁷⁷ For the argument that Samuel is meant to be viewed as an inheritor to Moses, see Rolf Rendtdorff, "Samuel the Prophet: A Link between Moses and the Kings," in *The Quest for Context and Meaning: Studies in Biblical Intertextuality in Honor of James A. Sanders* (ed. Craig A. Evans and Shemaryahu Talmon; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 27-36; A. P. B. Breytenbach, "Who is Behind the Samuel Narrative," in de Moor and Van Rooy, *Past, Present, Future*, 53-54; Gnuse, "Dream Theophany," 320-21.

that presented in biblical literature in general (and specifically that presented in Exod 2, 1 Sam 17, and 1 Kgs 1-2). Whether this alternative represents a diachronic development in the view of masculinity or whether it is a vision of a new hegemonic masculinity offered in response to a dominant contemporaneous masculinity is an intriguing but ultimately unanswerable question.

The five narratives analyzed in the previous two chapters constitute the total number of successful male coming-of-age stories in the HB. However, I show in the next chapter that the coming-of-age theme is not limited to these stories of successful coming of age. On the contrary, some narratives can be read as inversions of the coming-of-age theme—that is, as tales of *failing to come of age*. In the next chapter, I identify two narratives of this sort and explain why societies might tell stories about a boy failing to transition to manhood. The chapter concludes by considering the function of the failure-to-come-of-age theme within the broader Deuteronomistic History.

Chapter 5: Failing to Come of Age in the Hebrew Bible

Thus far this study has investigated the transition of several biblical figures from boyhood to manhood in order to demonstrate the significance of the male coming-of-age theme in the HB. This theme, however, is not defined solely by these success stories. If it were, and if success in maturation was inevitable for each male character making this transition, the stories likely would not hold the interest of an audience. There must be a potential for failure, otherwise the achievement of leaving boyhood behind and becoming a man—or any other accomplishment—is empty. The potential for failure does not merely exist in the implicit background of all coming-of-age stories but also may be the explicit subject of a given narrative. These tales of the failure to transition from boyhood to manhood are the subject of this chapter.

Two biblical stories, both in Judges, invert the coming-of-age theme and narrate the failure of a boy to mature into a man. The first is the rarely discussed tale of Gideon's son Jether in Judg 8:18-21, which illustrates the theme directly and concisely. The second—the narrative of Samson in Judg 13-16—presents a more detailed, yet subtler treatment of this theme. The following analysis first investigates the presence and nuances of this “failure to come of age” theme in both narratives. I then offer some suggestions inspired by folklore studies on the possible purpose of narratives describing

failure to come of age like these two (beyond simply offering a foil for successful tales of maturation), and their potential *Sitz im Leben* in an ancient Israelite context at the time of their original composition. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the literary function of the Samson cycle specifically, paying special attention to how DtrH uses Samson's immaturity to indicate broader themes in the book of Judges and the Deuteronomistic History as a whole.

5.1 Jether's Failure to Come-of-Age

Judges 8:18-21 functions as an odd coda to the narrative of Gideon's military exploits and rarely elicits comment from ancient or modern readers.¹ Up to this point in the Gideon cycle, the Israelite judge, called and empowered by Yhwh, has miraculously turned back the Midianite threat against Israel with a greatly outnumbered force and a clever battle plan (Judg 7:15-23). After executing the captains of the Midianite army, Oreb and Zeeb (7:25), Gideon pursues and eventually captures the Midianite kings Zebah and Zalmunna, while also punishing the Israelite cities of Penuel and Succoth for not supporting his weary troops during this mission (8:1-17). In Judg 8:18, however, the

¹ Indeed, Josephus eliminates any mention of this section of the Gideon cycle in his *Antiquities* (see *A.J.* 5:6). The limited attention that modern scholars have devoted to the Jether story is discussed throughout this section.

narrative takes an unanticipated turn. The reader learns for the first time here that Gideon's motive for capturing the Midianite kings is not the defense of Israel, but a personal vendetta. Zebah and Zalmunna were responsible for the deaths of Gideon's half-brothers, and he acts to avenge their blood.² Not only do new motives emerge in this brief textual unit, but so too does a previously unmentioned character: Gideon's firstborn son Jether. Although Jether's appearance is admittedly brief, these four verses reveal much about biblical conceptions of manhood and boyhood.³ Moreover, they show how a boy's attempt to prove himself as a man can fail.

Jether enters the narrative when Gideon orders him to rise and kill the two captive Midianite kings (קִוִּים הָרֹג אוֹתָם; Judg 8:20).⁴ With this order, Jether is called to demonstrate a quintessential quality of biblical masculinity (strength, here both of body

² In accordance with the obligation of male next of kin to act as blood avenger for a murdered relative. See S. David Sperling, "Blood, Avenger Of," *ABD* 1:763-64.

³ Stanley Isser (*Sword of Goliath*, 22-25) suggests that brief allusions to otherwise unknown characters such as this in the biblical text often point to a larger corpus of legend, no longer extant, wherein the character may have a larger role. In other words, the biblical text does not refer to a figure like Jether unless traditions existed in which he is more prominent. This possibility further establishes the need to examine this short passage and minor character.

⁴ Scholars disagree on the motive for Gideon's order to Jether. On one hand, Niditch (*Judges*, 105) speculates that the intent may have been to dishonor the kings by having someone who is not their equal execute them, drawing parallels to Goliath's anger at being challenged by the boy David in 1 Sam 17:42-43. On the other hand, Soggin claims that Gideon's order coheres with the "law of chivalry," and therefore is a proper and proportionate act not meant as an insult to the kings (J. Alberto Soggin, *Judges: A Commentary* [trans. John S. Bowden; OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1981], 157). Angel believes the purpose to be Gideon's training of his eldest son as a possible successor (Hayyim Angel, "The Positive and Negative Traits of Gideon: As Reflected in his Sons Jotham and Abimelech," *JBQ* 34 [2006]: 165).

and will) on the stage most fit for its expression—the battlefield.⁵ Moreover, since the Midianite kings killed Jether’s uncle, the boy’s execution of the kings functions as an expression of kinship solidarity and a defense of family honor, both of which are features of manhood in the worldview of the HB.⁶ Instead of rising to this challenge and passing this test of masculinity, Jether is unable to draw his sword, “for he was afraid, because he was still a boy” (בִּי יָרָא כִּי עוֹדֶנּוּ נָעָר; Judg 8:20). Seeing Jether’s inability to act, Zebah and Zalmunna ask Gideon himself to kill them, supporting their request by quoting what appears to be a popular proverb: “As the man is, so too is his manly strength” (כָּאִישׁ גְּבוּרָתוֹ; 8:21).⁷

Several factors demonstrate that this brief tangent in the Gideon cycle narrates the failure to transition from boyhood to manhood. First, the proverb quoted by Zebah and Zalmunna draws a direct correlation between strength and manhood, with the effect of showing that Jether, in the words of Schneider, “was *not man enough* to carry out [Zebah and Zalmunna’s execution].”⁸ The proverb’s use of the term גְּבוּרָה (translated

⁵ See chapter 2, 61-67.

⁶ See chapter 2, 85-91, 91-92.

⁷ For the proverbial nature of this phrase, see Soggin, *Judges*, 155; Susan Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible: A Study in the Ethics of Violence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 104. The translation of the proverb is mine. The Hebrew גְּבוּרָה is translated “manly strength” to highlight the noun’s relationship with the related terms “man” (אִישׁ) and “mighty warrior” (גִּבּוֹר).

⁸ Tammi J. Schneider, *Judges* (Berit Olam; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2000), 126. Emphasis mine.

above as “manly strength”) suggests even further that the difference between boyhood and manhood is in view here. Not only does the noun sonically recall the word for “man” (גִּבּוֹר) and “mighty warrior/hero” (גִּבּוֹרִים) by employing the same root as these terms—comparable to the relationship between the Greek term for “courage” (ἀνδρεία) and “man” (άνήρ)—but this same word is used elsewhere in the HB to emphasize the difference between a boy (נָעַר) and a noble (חֹזֶה) adult (Qoh 10:16-17). The contention that Jether’s diffidence may stem from a chivalric code of conduct that proscribed the killing of men of superior rank therefore fails to recognize the proverb’s importance to the story’s meaning.⁹ Since the proverb clearly draws attention to the difference between boy and man with regard to “manly strength,” its use in this story only makes sense if the Midianite kings are commenting on the frightened Jether’s tender age in contrast to strong manhood.

The tale of Judg 8:18-21 strongly suggests a reading that highlights the failure to come of age for other reasons beyond the meaning and terminology of the proverb in Judg 8:21. For instance, Jether’s fear specifically prohibits him from “drawing [his sword]” (לִּשְׁאֹף; Judg 8:20). In the same chapter the phrase “men drawing the

⁹ See Macdonald, “Status,” 158. Moreover, it is difficult to image a military code of conduct where such conventions would outweigh the duty of a soldier to carry out a commander’s orders—especially if the commander is also one’s father!

sword" (אִישׁ שֶׁלֶף חֶרֶב; Judg 8:10) is synonymous with "soldier." The implication is that if Jether cannot draw his sword, he is no soldier (i.e., he is no "man drawing the sword"); therefore, he is no *man* at all. Furthermore, scholars often note that Jether's fear in this section reflects the "fear theme" running through the Gideon cycle—viz., Gideon's fear at incurring his kinsmen's wrath for destroying their altar to Baal (Judg 6:27), his fear to enter the Midianite camp alone (Judg 7:10), and Yhwh's removal of Gideon's frightened soldiers from his army at the "Spring of Trembling" (עֵין חֶרֶד; Judg 7:1-2).¹⁰ However, these scholars fail to distinguish the difference between the fear evidenced by Gideon earlier in the story and that of Jether here. Gideon's fear is the fear of being killed, while Jether's is the fear of killing. The former fear does not disqualify an individual from being considered a mighty warrior. Gideon, for example, is referred to as a mighty warrior (גִּבּוֹר; Judg 6:12), full of strength (כֹּחַ; Judg 6:14) despite his fears. Nor does such fear disqualify one from being considered a man—note that the fear of the enemy and defeat may lead to being dismissed from the army (Deut 20:3-8), but still these frightened soldiers are addressed as "men" (20:8).

¹⁰ See Yaira Amit, *The Book of Judges: The Art of Editing* (trans. Jonathan Chipman; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 238; Barry G. Webb, *The Book of Judges: An Integrated Reading* (JSOTSup 46; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), 151; J. Paul Tanner, "The Gideon Narrative as the Focal Point of Judges," *BSac* 149 (1992): 158-60; E. T. A. Davidson, *Intricacy, Design, and Cunning in the Book of Judges* (Philadelphia: Xlibris, 2008), 119; Dennis T. Olson "The Book of Judges: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," *NIB* 2: 808.

In contrast, the fear of killing is a different matter entirely—one that is more at odds with the image of masculinity in the biblical text. Admittedly, since Jether provides the only example of this type of fear in the HB, any conclusion is limited and speculative. Even so, military leaders have long recognized that, in the words of World War II general George Marshall, “the fear of killing rather than the fear of being killed [is] the most common cause of battle failure.”¹¹ In sum, while Gideon’s fear of being killed may be incongruent with an idealized image of soldierly valor, Jether’s fear of killing is more fundamentally incompatible with being a soldier. Given the correlation between manhood and battlefield prowess in the biblical text (see chapter 2), Jether’s fear is recognized as distinctly unmanly.

Another indicator of the failure-to-come-of-age theme in this tale is the extent to which the story provides a negative foil to the successful battlefield coming-of-age of the נָעֹר David in 1 Sam 17, which is discussed in chapter 3.¹² A significant amount of evidence suggests that such a contrast exists. Whereas David boldly crosses over the

¹¹ Quoted in Greg Jaffe, “War Wounds: Breaking a Taboo, Army Confronts Guilt After Combat,” *Wall Street Journal*, August 17, 2005. Cited 11 January 2012. Online: <http://online.wsj.com/article/0SB112424442541515220,00.html>.

¹² Auld argues that the Gideon cycle is a late retelling of several biblical stories, based on the many echoes of other texts in the HB found in the cycle; see A. Graeme Auld, “Gideon: Hacking at the Heart of the Old Testament,” *VT* 39 [1989]: 257-67. If Auld is correct, this contrast between the story of David’s coming-of-age and that of Jether’s failure to do so may be intentional.

threshold into manhood covered in the blood of the sentry protecting the gateway to maturity (i.e., Goliath), Jether is not yet ready to engage in the test of strength that must accompany the transition of an adolescent to manhood. David is shown as a master of fear (in contrast to the so-called “men of Israel” who are afraid to face Goliath [1 Sam 17:11, 24]), and Jether is defined by his fear (Judg 8:20). Jether cannot defend the honor of his close kinsman, but David defends the honor of all the men of Israel. David demonstrates martial aptitude by unsheathing (הִלָּשׁ) the oversized sword of a giant (1 Sam 17:51), but Jether cannot even draw (הִלָּשׁ) his own sword. Jether is marked by his lack of manly strength (גִּבּוֹרָה; Judg 8:21), whereas David’s new characterization in 1 Sam 17:56 employs a term replete with connotations of power and passion (עָלָם).¹³ David walks away from the battlefield with the trophies of his successful transition in his hand (the giant’s head and armor [1 Sam 17:54]); in contrast, Jether must watch while his father takes the trophies that should have been his (the crescents on the necks of the Midianite kings’ camels [Judg 8:21]). In sum, David makes a significant transition towards manhood in 1 Sam 17, while the fearful Jether does not display “manly strength” and thus fails to pass the test that would establish his identity as a man.

¹³ See the discussion of the term עָלָם in chapter 2, 146-52.

5.2 *Samson the Man-Child*

While the failure to come of age is illustrated succinctly in the Jether story of Judg 8, the Samson cycle (Judg 13-16) demonstrates this theme with more subtlety and over the span of a much longer text, perhaps explaining why biblical scholars have not recognized it. However, Mobley's recent work arguing for the importance of *liminality* in the text's depiction of Samson lays the groundwork for examining Samson's failure to come of age.¹⁴ By highlighting Samson's liminality, Mobley shows that the character's defining quality is not his famous hair or renowned strength, but rather his status as a character caught "betwixt and between" two different worlds or states of being. The "liminal hero" Samson straddles borders, at once occupying the ground on both sides, or moving unabated and carefree between them.¹⁵

Mobley's study is noteworthy for its thoroughgoing application of the concept of liminality to Samson's character; but Samson's transcending of social, political, and even gender borders did not escape earlier readers. For instance, Gunkel drew attention to Samson's perpetual location at the border of nature and culture—a "wild man" marked as much by animalistic traits (beastly ferocity, untamed hair) as by the trappings of

¹⁴ Mobley, *Liminal Hero*.

¹⁵ Mobley compares Samson to other ancient Near Eastern "liminal heroes" like Enkidu (ibid., 31-33). Susan Ackerman (*When Heroes Love*) similarly applies the concept of liminality to other heroes of ancient Near Eastern literature, including Enkidu, Gilgamesh, David, and Jonathan.

human society.¹⁶ Niditch anticipated certain features of Mobley's argument by showing that Samson not only straddles the border between nature and culture but also that between man and woman. Samson, the once masculine and mighty warrior, is effectively feminized by the Philistines when they capture him (Judg 16:21-25), but later this feminization is overturned by his reassertion of manly might in his final act of vengeance (16:29-30).¹⁷ Mobley builds upon these early soundings of the liminality theme and provides many more examples of the theme at work. For example, he notes that even such minor details as Samson's status as a Danite—a member of a borderland tribe living adjacent to the enemy Philistines—functions to emphasize his liminality to an ancient Israelite audience.¹⁸ For Mobley, however, Samson's liminality is most visible

¹⁶ See Hermann Gunkel, *Reden und Aufsätze* (ed. Hermann Gunkel; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1913), 38-64. For an argument that Gunkel's characterization of Samson as a "wild man" is too simplistic, particularly in its disregard for Samson's more cultured and urbane qualities, see James Crenshaw, *Samson: A Secret Betrayed, A Vow Ignored* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1978), 17-18.

¹⁷ See Susan Niditch, "Samson as Culture Hero, Trickster, and Bandit: The Empowerment of the Weak," *CBQ* 52 (1990): 616-17. Samson's feminization at the hands of the Philistines, according to Niditch, is seen in the symbolic castration of having his hair cut, being forced to do work traditionally associated with women (grinding grain), and "making sport" (קחש) before the Philistines (which Niditch identifies as language of a woman's sexual subjugation to a man).

¹⁸ Mobley, *Liminal Hero*, 14.

in his free movement across the borders between house and field,¹⁹ agitation and rest,²⁰ and the social worlds of men and women.²¹

This emphasis on liminality common to recent scholarly readings of the Samson cycle provides a useful lens for interpretation. However, the concept has yet to be applied to one of the most significant facets of Samson's character. Among the many borders that Samson is unable to cross permanently is that separating boyhood and manhood.²² Samson, in other words, is a perpetual man-child.

The oversight of this feature of Samson's liminality on the part of scholars is surprising given the history of the concept of liminality in scholarship. Liminality, as discussed in chapter 1, was originally a central idea in the anthropological work of Arnold van Gennep, and later inspired Victor Turner's anthropological thought.²³ Only later was the notion of liminality imported into biblical studies via literary theory. It is worthwhile to note that van Gennep and Turner frequently employed the concept in

¹⁹ Ibid., 37-65.

²⁰ Ibid., 66-84.

²¹ Ibid., 85-108.

²² *Contra* Mobley, who refers to Samson's actions in Judg 14-16 as his "adult adventures" (ibid., 1) and rejects the concept that any "youthful crisis" is on display in the story of this fully grown man. (ibid., 13). See also Amit, *Art of Editing* (274-75; 297), who argues that Samson has "grown up" and completed his maturation by the end of Judg 13. Niditch, in contrast, identifies Samson as an example of the social bandit typology in traditional literature—a character that significantly is typically a "young [man] between puberty and marriage" ("Culture Hero," 622). Still, while Niditch recognizes Samson's young age, she does not draw attention to the importance of Samson's liminal status on the spectrum from boyhood to manhood.

²³ See chapter 1, 19-25.

their analyses of the coming-of-age rituals that many tribal cultures use to mark the transition from boyhood to manhood. The investigation below — which demonstrates Samson's liminality with regard to his maturity as a man— therefore reconnects the concept of liminality with its original context and emphasis on describing the transition from boyhood to manhood. Several indications within the text of the Samson cycle point to the hero's failure to make this transition.

At first glance, it seems ridiculous to posit that Samson's depiction in the text of Judges is anything less than hyper-masculine. Samson is not just any man; he seems to be an *Übermensch*: the embodiment of idealized machismo. In some ways, this is true. Certainly, as studies of ancient Israelite masculinity show, one of the most important features of manhood in that culture, according to its texts, is physical strength.²⁴ Moreover, this male ideal of physical strength is most appropriately displayed on the battlefield. When one instead displays weakness on that stage (viz., Jether), one's manhood is called into question. Given Samson's renowned might and the high number of Philistine enemy dead attributed to him throughout the narrative (such as the one thousand Philistine men that he slays with the jawbone of an ass in Judg 15:14-16), Samson clearly exemplifies this quality of masculine invincibility. Moreover, as Niditch

²⁴ See the overview of this scholarship in chapter 2, 61-67.

argues, long hair like Samson's is an indicator of masculinity to an ancient Near Eastern audience, for whom a man's hair functioned to symbolize "manliness, maturity, and power."²⁵ Finally, Samson's facility with language—demonstrated by his affinity for word games/figures of speech (e.g. Judg 14:18), poetry (15:16), and riddles (14:14)—corresponds to another fundamental characteristic of hegemonic Israelite masculinity: intelligence, and particularly the mastery of the art of rhetoric and persuasion.²⁶

Alongside Samson's manly traits (strength, long hair, rhetorical skill), however, are other features in the narrative that point to his immaturity and boyishness. These more boyish features of Samson's characterization, which are scrutinized below, demonstrate that Samson's recognized liminality extends to his failure to transition completely from boyhood to manhood. Before enumerating these boyish traits, however, two pieces of textual evidence that would seem at first to rule out an analysis of Samson as a case of arrested development must be addressed and dismissed.

²⁵ Susan Niditch, *My Brother Esau is a Hairy Man: Hair and Identity in Ancient Israel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 50. Niditch cites Irene Winter ("Art in Empire: The Royal Image and the Visual Dimensions of Assyrian Ideology" in *Assyria 1995: Proceedings of the 10th Anniversary Symposium of the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, Helsinki September 7-11, 1995* [ed. Simo Parpola and Robert M. Whiting; Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1997], 371), who compares the long facial hair common to the depiction of Assyrian monarchs to the long mane of a dominant male in a pride of lions.

²⁶ The connection between the linguistic play characteristic of riddles and the demonstration of special knowledge (both cultural and sexual) is made by Crenshaw in his discussion of Samson's wit and intelligence (*Secret Betrayed*, 99-120). See also my discussion of the connection between intelligence, rhetorical skill, and wisdom in chapter 2, 67-69.

The first is based on Judg 13:24, which states that the boy Samson “grew” (וַיִּגְדַּל). Some translations (e.g., NJPS, NAS) render the verb here as “grew up,” a translational choice implying that Samson had matured completely and left childhood behind.²⁷ Since the text explicitly states that Samson “grew up,” according to this argument, how then could he still be reckoned as a boy or young man? This objection, however, has a significant flaw. It misconstrues the meaning of the verb גָּדַל by assuming that in every case the verb implies “growing up,” when just as frequently it simply denotes “growing.”²⁸ For instance, in Gen 21:8 the baby Isaac is said first to have grown (וַיִּגְדַּל), and then to have been weaned. Since the verb here describes the growth of an infant from birth to the time of weaning at approximately age three, it clearly does not imply “growing up” in the sense of achieving mature adulthood.

The second objection draws attention to the fact that Samson appears to be sexually active, as his visit to the prostitute in Gaza (Judg 16:1-3) indicates. If Samson has crossed the significant border between virginity and sexual knowledge, the argument goes, characterizing him as a boy is a misreading of the text. This objection, too, is misguided. It is premised on modern views of the significance of sexual

²⁷ Certainly Mobley and Amit would agree with this translational choice, as they believe that the text passes over Samson’s adolescence, only revisiting the character as a fully grown adult (see 299 n. 22). See also Niditch (*Judges*, 141), who translates the verb as “grew up.”

²⁸ See also the discussion of גָּדַל in chapter 4, 241-42, 266 n. 50.

experience to a boy's coming-of-age. As I argue in chapter 2, however, the boundary between virginity and sexual experience is more socially significant for girls and young women in the HB (viz., the importance of a female's intact virginity in such legal texts as Deut 22:13-21) than for young men.²⁹ Samson, then, can simultaneously be sexually active and still very much a boy in the estimation of both the biblical text and the society that produced it.

Having dismissed these two objections, the way is clear the way for a discussion of the characteristics that indicate Samson's immaturity and boyishness. When these boyish traits are viewed alongside Samson's masculine features, a portrait of Samson as perpetually liminal with regard to his masculine development emerges.

5.2.1 Evidence in the Text Indicating Samson's Immaturity

5.2.1.1 His lack of children and unmarried status

The first indicator of Samson's immaturity is that he remains childless throughout his life. The virile production of multiple offspring is a fundamental feature of biblical masculinity—just as much as the strength, intelligence, or hairiness mentioned above.³⁰ For instance, when Absalom's equally famous head of hair is first

²⁹ See chapter 2, 144 n. 182.

³⁰ See chapter 2, 82-84.

mentioned in 2 Sam 14:26, the description is immediately followed in v.27 by a report of his success in siring children: three sons and a daughter. According to Niditch, this is evidence that for the biblical writers, hair is understood as the physical sign of the quality of “fertility and manly fecundity.”³¹ Samson’s possession of a telltale marker of the manly trait of fertility—i.e., his long hair—while simultaneously showing no evidence of that fertility through offspring, already suggests the blurring of boundaries characteristic of liminality.

As argued in chapter 2, the fertility so central to normative Israelite masculinity is not viewed as an end in itself. The goal of manly virility was not simply the fathering of many children, but rather the production of legitimate male heirs. This is especially true in the Deuteronomistic tradition to which the final form of the Samson cycle belongs, where legitimate male heirs are essential to “perpetuating a name in Israel” (Deut 25:6-7)—a task this tradition considers vital to Israelite manhood.³² In the Deuteronomic (Dtn) literature, a child is considered legitimate if he or she is the product of a legitimate marital union; otherwise the child would be excluded from the

³¹ Niditch, *Esau*, 79.

³² For the expectation that an Israelite man “perpetuate a name in Israel,” see George (“Regimentation,” 75).

congregation of Yhwh (Deut 23:2).³³ Furthermore, while exogamy is not totally prohibited (note David's marriage to a Canaanite and an Aramaean in 2 Sam 3:3), the Dtn tradition generally discourages marriage to foreign women.³⁴ Therefore, if an Israelite man is to perform the important manly duty of perpetuating his name by producing male heirs, he is expected to be married and preferably that marriage is endogamous.

Therefore, Samson's failure to live up to the masculine ideal presented in the Dtn literature and the HB as a whole goes deeper than his lack of offspring. Since this quality of virile fertility is only properly expressed within the bounds of a legitimate and ideally endogamous marital union, both Samson's unmarried status and his persistent attraction to foreign women further contribute to his characterization as a boy who has not completely matured into manhood.³⁵

³³ The Jephthah narrative (Judg 11:1-12:7), wherein the protagonist is excluded by his fellow Israelites for being the product of an illegitimate union between his Israelite father and a prostitute, demonstrates legitimacy's enduring importance in the Dtn History, and specifically in Judges.

³⁴ Within the legal code of Deuteronomy, note the prohibition of marriage to Canaanites (7:3) and the apparent moratorium of three generations placed on intermarriage with Edomites and Egyptians (23:7-8) and of ten generations in the case of Ammonites and Moabites (23:2-6). Also indicative of this general disapproval of exogamy in the Dtn legal code is the elaborate procedure in Deut 21:10-14 that must accompany an Israelite man's marriage to a foreign woman captured in war; see Hamilton, "Marriage [OT and ANE]," 564. The most obvious example of the dangers of exogamy to ideal Israelite manhood in the Dtn History is that of Solomon (1 Kgs 11:1-8), whose foreign wives turn the king away from his devotion to Yhwh. Finally, and most relevantly to the present discussion, Samson's parents voice the Dtn disapproval of exogamy in Judg 14:3, pleading with their son to reconsider his choice of a Philistine bride.

³⁵ Samson's ill-fated wedding in Judg 14 hardly constitutes a marriage, especially considering that it is unlikely that the marriage was ever consummated; see Mieke Bal, "The Rhetoric of Subjectivity," *Poetics Today* 5 [1984]: 354; Soggin, *Judges*, 242. This may explain the ease with which the Timnite's father can give

5.2.1.2 His impetuosity

A second sign of Samson's failure to mature is his tendency to engage in rash and disproportionately violent actions, which is frequently attested in the narrative. For example, Samson destroys the Philistine harvest in reaction to having his amorous intentions thwarted (Judg 15:4-5). He slaughters the Philistines as vengeance for the death of his betrothed (15:7-8). He obstinately insists on courting Philistine women in the face of his parents' objections (14:3)—a potentially treasonous act especially worthy of reproach in the early books of the Dtr history, in which the Philistines are depicted as Israel's archetypal enemy. His lack of impulse control results in a careless violation of his nazirite vows when he eats honey from a lion's carcass (14:8-9). In his final, suicidal act of massive destruction and death, Samson's predilection towards disproportionate violence reaches its culmination, considering that his stated motive is only to avenge his blinded eyes (16:30).

In expressing such impetuosity, Samson exhibits a characteristic often employed in the description of children, and boys in particular, in the HB, as discussed

her away to Samson's "best man" (Judg 15:2). Consequently, when Samson and the Timnite woman are referred to as "husband" and "wife" with the terms **זָרָא** (Judg 14:15) and **אִשָּׁה** (Judg 14:15, 16, 20; 15:1, 6), this signifies a potential status more than an actual one.

in chapter 2. The ideal Israelite *man*, in contrast, is marked by self-restraint and impulse control, carefully keeping his desire toward gluttony, unbridled violence, and wanton sexuality in check.³⁶ The Samson cycle implicitly highlights this contrast between boyish and manly behavior. While the text does not necessarily condemn Samson's impetuosity outright, it does indicate that uncontrolled violence breeds more violence, in that the cycle of vengeance Samson perpetuates only concludes with his death and that of his Philistine enemies.³⁷ Moreover, the narrative shows the tragic results of heedlessly indulging one's appetites at the expense of fidelity to one's vows and loyalty to one's people. The effect is to emphasize the gap between Samson's inability to control his passions—and thus his immaturity— and an Israelite adult man's proper behavior.

5.2.1.3 His strong connection to his parents

A third sign of Samson's incomplete transition to manhood is his exceptionally close relationship with his parents. Crenshaw emphasizes this characteristic to the point of arguing that one of the chief tensions in Samson's character—as well as in the Samson

³⁶ See the discussion of this crucial difference between boyhood and manhood in the HB in chapter 2, 80-82, 113-16, 124-25.

³⁷ In illustrating the dangers of rash and unrestrained violence, the Samson narrative reflects a repeated theme in Judges, one that reaches its horrific culmination in the cycle of intra-Israelite vengeance and sexual violence found in Judg 19-21.

cycle as a whole—is that between “filial devotion and erotic attachment.”³⁸ This tension is evident in Judg 14:16, when Samson is pressed by his betrothed bride to reveal the answer to his riddle. His response, which is to ask incredulously how he could be expected to reveal the answer to her *when he has not yet even told his parents*, highlights Samson’s devotion to his mother and father over his fiancée.

Judges 14:5-9 provides another example of Samson’s close connection to his parents. Here Samson, having found honey in the carcass of the lion he had killed earlier, postpones his visit to his Timnite lover (and perhaps even turns back from visiting her entirely—the text is unclear) in order to share this treat with his parents. More than just providing evidence of a timid reluctance to set out independently into the world—and away from his parents—Samson’s actions here take on special significance because it is the potentially sexual relationship with the Timnite woman that he is rejecting in favor of his parents. The symbolic importance of honey as a food often associated with fertility in folkloric narratives further highlights the sexual component of this scene’s imagery.³⁹ Samson’s choice to share his honey with his parents instead of with the Timnite woman is therefore comparable to a young man today

³⁸ Crenshaw, *Secret Betrayed*, 65.

³⁹ For the relationship between honey and fertility, see Niditch, *Judges*, 156, and Bal, “Rhetoric of Subjectivity,” 352.

purchasing roses and chocolates for a romantic rendezvous, and then promptly offering them to his parents!⁴⁰ The scene implies that Samson has failed to reach the point of sexual maturity at which he can direct his erotic energies outward—that is, the point at which he can leave his father and mother and cling to his wife (Gen 2:24).

Samson's bond with his parents is also evident in the frequency with which his adventures into Philistine territory end with a childlike retreat to the safety of his parents.⁴¹ For example, his first trip down to Timnah ends in the next verse with his return to his parents (Judg 14:1-2). His journey to visit the Timnite woman in the same chapter (14:8-9) is postponed in order that Samson may share his honey with his parents. Samson's ruined and unconsummated marriage is immediately followed by his slaughter of thirty Ashkelonites, but the story's culmination finds him returning to the safety of his father's house (14:19). The symbolism of Samson's return to his parents

⁴⁰ The humor of this scene likely was not lost on an ancient audience. James Crenshaw ("Samson," *ABD* 5:953) claims that the tale of the lion and the found honey would have elicited "raucous laughter" from listeners.

⁴¹ This is not meant to suggest that Samson must completely separate himself *spatially* from his parents in order to mature. The modern notion that "leaving home" is essential to maturation does not fit the patrilocal ancient Israelite context, in which multiple generations would live together in the same domicile (See, e.g., Meyers, "Family in Early Israel," 16-19). I contend that Samson's tendency to return repeatedly to his parents—frequently after facing difficulty or rejection in the outer world—metaphorically represents his lack of *emotional* detachment from his parents.

continues even after his death, since his corpse is brought from Gaza and placed in his father's tomb (16:31).⁴²

The primary significance of Samson's exceptionally strong bond to his parents is that he never achieves the emotional separation and individuation from one's parents that comes with maturation, which is a necessary prerequisite for sexuality and marriage (Gen 2:24). Given the importance of marriage and reproduction to Israelite manhood in the Hebrew Bible, a male who is not ready for these experiences is not yet fully considered a man in the society that produced these texts.

5.2.1.4 Terminological considerations

A fourth indicator of Samson's perpetual state of boyhood is the frequency with which Hebrew words for "boy" and "young man" are applied to him. The Hebrew נַעַר, or "boy," is employed to describe Samson five times in the cycle of narratives (Judg 13:5, 7, 8, 12, 24), while בָּחוּר, meaning "young man" is used once (Judg 14:10).⁴³ In contrast,

⁴² While this act may reflect normative Israelite burial practice (see, e.g., Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, "Burials," *ABD* 1:784), it is noteworthy that of the many burials of Israelite leaders catalogued in Judges (Joshua in 2:9; Gideon in 8:32; Tola in 10:2; Jair in 10:5; Jephthah in 12:7; Izban in 12:10; Elon in 12:12; Abdon 12:15; Samson in 16:21), only Gideon's and Samson's contain an explicit mention that they were buried in their father's tomb.

⁴³ Note, however, that it is unclear whether Samson is considered a בָּחוּר in Judg 14:10 because the text only states that Samson had a feast before his wedding because that was the custom for בָּחוּרִים. Presumably Samson is reckoned among these בָּחוּרִים; but this is not certain.

terminology connoting adult manhood is generally not applied to Samson.⁴⁴ This is especially striking given the fact that the two major judges preceding him—Gideon and Jephthah—are not only referred to with the word **אִישׁ** (Gideon in 7:14; Jephthah in 10:18 [cf. 11:8]), but also with a term even more suggestive of robust masculinity: **גִּבּוֹר חַיִל** (in 6:12 and 11:1, respectively).⁴⁵

Even when Samson offers three times to tell Delilah how she could weaken him (Judg 16:7, 11, 17), he claims that the effect of her actions would be to make him “like any other *human being*” (e.g., 16:7: **וְהָיִיתִי כְּאַחֵד הָאָדָם**).⁴⁶ Significantly, the word used is **אָדָם**, a term that lacks a definitive gendered meaning and is often best translated as “person,” “human being,” or “mortal.”⁴⁷ Samson therefore does not claim that he can be weakened like any other *man*, as some translations suggest (NJPS, KJV). If that had been

⁴⁴ Samson is never identified as a **גִּבּוֹר**, and the single reference to him as an **אִישׁ** (Judg 14:15) ironically ends up highlighting his inability to attain the status of manhood. Here the Philistines urge the Timnite woman to coax Samson into revealing the answer to his riddle, referring to Samson as “your husband” (**אִישִׁיךָ**). Given that Samson’s marriage is ultimately a failure and was likely never consummated (see 305-6 n. 35), this term’s application to Samson by the Philistines—and, notably, not by the narrator—does not constitute a narrative acknowledgement of Samson’s manhood. In fact, it seems more to mock the would-be groom for his unsuccessful attempt at marriage.

⁴⁵ Mobley (*Empty Men*, 35) shows that **גִּבּוֹר** functions etymologically as an intensive form of **גִּבֵּר**, and therefore denotes an emphasized masculinity—or “masculinity squared”—and is best translated with the English “he-man.” Note also that in the opening line of the Samson cycle, his father Manoah is called a “man” (**אִישׁ**; 13:1); and the narrative that immediately follows the Samson cycle similarly begins by identifying one of its main characters—Micah—as a “man” (**אִישׁ**; 17:1).

⁴⁶ Following Robert G. Boling’s translation (*Judges: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [AB 6A; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975], 245-46). Emphasis mine.

⁴⁷ See, e.g., Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann Jakob Stamm (“אָדָם I,” *HALOT* 1:14).

the narrative's intention, a more specifically gendered term like **אִישׁ** would be more appropriate. Instead, the contrast depicted is that between Samson's superhuman strength and that of a mere human.⁴⁸ In sum, nowhere does the text speak of Samson unambiguously as a man, nor does the character self-identify as a man. Rather, the text depicts Samson as a boy (**נֶעָר**), or at most as a young man who has yet to complete his maturation (**בְּחֹר**).

5.2.1.5 His age at death

The fifth indicator of Samson's immaturity concerns Samson's length of service as a judge. According to Judg 15:20 and 16:31, Samson judged Israel for twenty years. These twenty years immediately stand out as anomalous, because the paradigmatic length for a prominent judge to lead the tribes of Israel in Judges is forty years, as with Othniel (Judg 3:11), Deborah (5:31), and Gideon (8:28).⁴⁹ This discrepancy of twenty years between the length of Samson's career as judge over Israel and the ideal forty years begins to draw attention to Samson's youth because it highlights an unnatural truncation of his judgeship at his early and untimely death. Indeed, the narrator does

⁴⁸ See Othniel Margalith, "Samson's Riddle and Samson's Magic Locks," *VT* 36 (1986): 229.

⁴⁹ See Boling (*Judges*, 82-83) for a description of Othniel's career notice in Judg 3:7-11 as "exemplary" and paradigmatic for the tales of judges that follow. That Othniel's career as judge lasted forty years, therefore, establishes the ideal model for the careers of future judges. While other minor judges like Izban (Judg 12:9), Elon (12:11), and Abdon (12:14) judge Israel for less than forty years, no judge whose deeds are recounted at length besides Jephtah (12:7) rules for less than the ideal forty years.

this emphatically by reporting Samson's twenty-year career as judge on two separate occasions (Judg 15:20; 16:21), which is a departure from the standard style employed in Judges for chronicling this information.⁵⁰

The text may be communicating more here than merely reporting a leader's premature death, however. A close reading of the narrative reveals that twenty is not only the number of years that Samson judged Israel, but also is his age at the time of his death. In other words, according to the narrator's chronology, Samson judged Israel from the time of his birth.

This is not an untenable claim. A repeated theme, appearing three times in the Samson narrative (Judg 13:5, 7; 16:17), is that the hero is set apart as a charismatic nazirite *from the day of his birth*.⁵¹ Significantly, in Judg 13:5—the first verse where the theme appears in the Samson story—the child's nazirite status is placed immediately

⁵⁰ Some scholars see this repetition as evidence for different sources comprising the Samson cycle. See Amit (*Art of Editing*, 274-75 n. 54) for an extensive bibliography of scholars making this claim. Opposed to this position is Martin Noth (*Deuteronomistic History*, 52) who argues that the notices of Samson's rule as judge in Judg 15:20 and 16:31 are from the same hand. Joseph Blenkinsopp also argues for a "principle of unity in the Samson cycle" ("Structure and Style in Judges 13-16," *JBL* 82 [1963]:69). Furthermore, the strong case made by Cheryl Exum for the careful symmetry of the cycle ("Aspects of Symmetry and Balance in the Samson Saga," *JSOT* 19 [1981]: 3-29) as well as Robert Alter's convincing illumination of the cycle's use of key terms like נָזִיר and אִשָּׁה ("Samson Without Folklore," in *Text and Tradition: The Hebrew Bible and Folklore* [ed. Susan Niditch; SBL Semeia Studies; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990], 47-56) argue for the unity of the text.

⁵¹ Such anointing of a charismatic individual for a special office or role from the time of their birth or before is not uncommon in the HB. Jeremiah, for example, is informed by God that he was appointed a prophet to the nations from the womb (Jer 1:5). Note also that, as I argue is the case for Samson, Samuel too judges Israel "all the days of his life" according to 1 Sam 7:15.

alongside the pronouncement that he will begin to save Israel (וְהוּא יִחַל לְהוֹשִׁיעַ (אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל). This strongly suggests that this nazirite status is intimately connected with delivering the people from their enemies, one of the characteristic actions of an Israelite judge.⁵² Therefore, Samson's twenty-year reign as a judge of Israel corresponds with his time as a nazirite, because it is precisely this status that defines his saving role as judge. And as the text emphasizes, the length of Samson's nazirite status is from birth to death, a span of twenty years.

To be sure, the significance of Samson's death at age twenty is not immediately apparent but only comes to light when considered in view of the male life cycle in the HB. As I show in chapter 2, reaching the age of twenty marks a pivotal milestone in the male life cycle, especially in HB legal texts.⁵³ For example, when a boy reaches age twenty he is eligible for military service (Num 1:3, 18; 26:2), is accountable for his actions and choices (Num 14:29; 32:11), and can be taxed (Exod 30:14). Reporting that Samson died at twenty, then, has the same resonance to the ancient Israelite ear as saying a boy died at eighteen or twenty-one in contemporary American society. In each case, the

⁵² Note the frequency with which the root יָשַׁע is employed to describe a judge's action for Israel, just as it is used of Samson in Judg 13:5. See Judg 2:16, 18 (the opening précis of the cycle of sin-forgiveness-redemption in Judges, which describes how Yhwh would raise up judges to "deliver" Israel); and the following examples of judges said to have "delivered" Israel with this root: Judg 3:9 (Othniel); 3:15 (Ehud); 3:31 (Shamgar); 6:14-15, 36-37; 8:22 (Gideon); 10:1 (Tola).

⁵³ See chapter 2, 93-94.

tragedy of the untimely death is compounded by the fact that death came just as the boy had become a man from the perspective of his society's laws. If an Israelite storyteller wished to highlight the theme of Samson's liminality between childhood and manhood, there is no more appropriate age for his death than twenty.

5.2.1.6 His lack of solidarity with adult men

The fifth and final indicator of Samson's liminality with regard to his maturation as a man is his lack of solidarity with his fellow Israelite men, an important characteristic of biblical masculinity. Samson is famously a loner, unique among the judges of Israel in that he achieves his victories against his people's enemies without any cooperation with them.⁵⁴

Nowhere is Samson's lack of solidarity with his fellow Israelite men more evident than in Judg 15:10-14. Here, Samson has just completed the destruction of

⁵⁴ The importance to a boy's maturation of a cooperative relationship with the adult males of his society is shown by anthropologist Frank W. Young. In his examination of fifty-four communities on six continents from the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, Young demonstrates that particularly in societies with high levels of adult male solidarity (like that described in the HB), a boy must be accepted into the social group of elder males in his culture to be considered a man. This is often accomplished through rites of passage that ensure the continuation of adult male solidarity, while also enabling boys to "view the world from the adult male standpoint" — a necessity if they are adequately to embody the male sex role (*Initiation Ceremonies*, 30).

According to this view, if a boy or young man has no evidence of acceptance by the adult males of his society, he has no evidence of his manhood. He is instead likely to remain stuck in boyhood—a case of arrested development—and cross into manhood only with great difficulty. Looking at Samson in light of Young's research, therefore, adds another, deeper layer to the depiction of his liminality with regard to his development as an adult man.

Philistines' harvest and has massacred of a large number of them. In spite of these daring actions against their most feared enemy, three thousand Judahite men *hide him* for his deeds against their Philistine subjugators, and bind him in order to deliver him into Philistine hands. This collaboration with the Philistines and betrayal of Samson is a far cry from the manly solidarity at the core of biblical masculinity. Tragically, until his kinsmen take his corpse back to his homeland (Judge 16:31), no group of men—neither the men of his own people nor the men of the Philistine society to which he is so compulsively drawn—claims him as one of their own and celebrates his manly deeds.⁵⁵

5.2.2 Summary

In sum, several factors indicate that the liminality so significant to Samson's characterization extends to his inability to cross the border definitively from boyhood to manhood. On the one hand, Samson's manly strength, long hair, and facility with words speak to the more mature side of the hero. On the other hand, Samson's unmarried and childless status, his predilection for rash and impetuous action, the terminology used to describe him, his excessively strong connection to his parents, and his lack of solidarity with fellow Israelite men are all features that contribute to the thematic development of

⁵⁵ Samson's failure to find acceptance among the Philistine men is obvious in light of the disastrous and mutually destructive consequences that result whenever Samson and Philistine men mix.

Samson's boyish side. Moreover, by reporting Samson's death at age twenty, the text succinctly portrays his liminal status between boyhood and manhood. Taken together, these manly and childlike attributes combine to create the image of Samson as a liminal man-child.

5.3 The Function and Social Context of Narratives Describing the Failure to Come-Of-Age

The next issue to address in this discussion is the question of why stories that feature a liminal character caught between boyhood and manhood like Samson, or a character that fails in his transition to manhood like Jether, would exist at all. Stated differently, in what social context would stories like these *originally* arise, and what would their purpose be?

One explanation for both the purpose and context of the "failing to come of age" theme comes from folklore studies.⁵⁶ In the last century, scholars in this field began to

⁵⁶ Applying research from folklore studies to the Samson cycle is appropriate in light of the general scholarly agreement on the folkloric and presumably oral origins of the Samson cycle. See, e.g., Everett Fox, "The Samson Cycle in an Oral Setting," *Alcheringa: Ethnopoetics* 4 (1978): 52; David Bynum, "Samson as a Biblical φῆρ ὁρεσκῶς," in Niditch, *Text and Tradition*, 57-73; Albert B. Lord, "Patterns of the Lives of the Patriarchs from Abraham to Samson and Samuel," in *ibid.*, 7-18. However, perhaps no better argument exists for the likelihood of an oral, folkloric context for the cycle's original composition than the fact that even Robert Alter's study of Samson, with its express purpose of showing how carefully composed the final form of the

recognize the recurring presence of oral traditions about young male characters who fail to overcome initiatory ordeals that, if passed, would confirm their status as adult men. For example, David Bynum's research among South Slavic storytellers identifies two adolescent novice characters—Mehmed Smailagić and Omer Hrnjica—who are frequent protagonists in stories that take up the theme of failing to come of age.⁵⁷ Margaret Beissinger finds a similar character in the Romanian epic cycle of the hero Novacs: the hero's son (or nephew, in some versions of the story) Gruia.⁵⁸ These characters over time have become so inseparably linked with the theme of failed transition to manhood that they rarely if ever appear as mature older characters in other tales from the respective cultures' oral tradition.⁵⁹ While each of these characters have attracted many tales in the storytelling traditions of these cultures, their stories typically follow a remarkably similar plotline: the young overconfident novice usually sets out to accomplish a heroic

story is as written literature, admits that it would be "foolish to ignore [the] abundance of folkloric elements" in the story ("Samson Without Folklore," in *ibid.*, 48).

In the case of the Jether narrative, applying folklore research is appropriate because, as Isser argues (see above, 291 n. 3), it is likely that characters like Jether who are only briefly mentioned in the HB were well known in the folklore of ancient Israel (hence they do not require extensive introduction in the HB).

⁵⁷ David E. Bynum, "Themes of the Young Hero in Serbocroatian Oral Epic Tradition," *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association* 83 (1968): 1296-1303.

⁵⁸ Margaret H. Beissinger, "Rites of Passage and Oral Storytelling in Romanian Epic and the New Testament," *Oral Tradition* 17 (2002): 236-58.

⁵⁹ Bynum, "Young Hero," 1296.

deed, often with the final goal of marriage in sight, yet he inevitably fails his ordeal and often requires the help of his father or other elder males to rescue him from his predicament.⁶⁰

In an attempt to explain the ubiquity of the failure-to-come-of-age theme in folklore—which Bynum traces all the way back to Homer—both Bynum and Beissinger offer an interpretation that stresses the value of these tales to society.⁶¹ They argue that this genre addresses intergenerational dynamics, specifically the succession of an older male generation by a younger generation.⁶² From their perspective, rehearsing these stories and highlighting this theme allows the elder generation to give voice to their fears of becoming socially marginalized and weakened, as well as their uncertainties about the readiness of the younger generation to assume leadership in the culture.

⁶⁰ See Beissinger, “Romanian Epic,” 242-43; Bynum, “Young Hero,” 1299-1300.

⁶¹ For Bynum’s recognition of the failure to come of age theme in Homer, see “Young Hero,” 1300. Bynum compares the tales of the Slavic initiatory heroes with those of Telemachus, Odysseus’s young son. Telemachus similarly goes on a quest to find his father, a quest that Charles Eckert shows to be filled with initiation themes (“Initiatory Motifs in the Story of Telemachus,” *Classical Journal* 59 [1963]: 49-57). Telemachus ultimately fails and is later freed from his tenuous fate as stepson to the potential new ruler of Ithaca by his father.

⁶² Beissinger writes that “...the Romanian initiation epics and their heroes articulate a variety of concerns relating to the traditional family and the succession of generations” (“Romanian Epic,” 237). Bynum similarly argues that the tale of failed maturation that he heard in his research in Yugoslavia “is quite overtly about the problems and process of ‘socializing’ a male child and about the crucial moments of ‘role-transference’ between father and sons” (“Young Hero,” 1297).

The work of Bynum and Beissinger offers some insight into the Samson cycle and the Jether narrative even if these two stories do not perfectly correspond to the typical tale of a Balkan novice hero.⁶³ Their research is most helpful for the suggestion that tales of arrested development and failing to come of age are composed and retold in response to intergenerational tensions. The presence of similar tensions, typically reflecting a fear of the marginalization of the elderly and the unease over generational succession, is already recognizable in certain texts in the Hebrew Bible. One need look no further than the commandment to honor father and mother (Exod 20:12) for proof: why establish this rule unless dishonor and mistreatment of the elderly were a persistent problem?⁶⁴

Biblical narratives also reflect intergenerational conflict. For example, Meyers notes that the family narratives of Genesis offer abundant evidence of the “inevitable” tensions

⁶³ The biblical stories do, however, share some similarities with the stories of Gruia, Mehmed Smailagić, and Omer Hrnijca. Like the Balkan novice heroes, Samson and Jether attempt to perform certain manly deeds (marriage in the case of the former, a display of battlefield prowess with the latter), but ultimately fail. Moreover, Jether’s story depicts him needing his father’s assistance to complete his task, a frequent feature in the Balkan tales. Samson further resembles the Balkan novice heroes because both have attracted to themselves a number of separate vignettes reflecting the arrested development theme, and do not appear in their respective narrative traditions as full-fledged men.

However, differences between the biblical stories and the Balkan tales are also apparent. Note that Samson is never rescued by a father figure in the course of his adventures (unlike the Balkan novice heroes and Jether). Similarly, if a cycle of Jether narratives existed consisting of many stories in which he fails to achieve manhood (as with the Balkan novice heroes and Samson), these are no longer extant.

⁶⁴ See Childs, *Book of Exodus*, 418; see also William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 19-40: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 2A; New York: Doubleday, 2006), 178. Both emphasize that this commandment is targeted at adult children, enjoining them to take care of their aging parents. The modern interpretation of this commandment—that young children obey their parents—may also have been implied, but was not as significant in the original context of the law (see also Exod 21:15, 17; Lev 20:9; Deut 27:16).

that result between generations living together in the village setting of ancient Israel.⁶⁵

Additionally, Berquist recognizes the presence of the theme of intergenerational tension in the story of Elisha and the taunting boys of Bethel (2 Kgs 2:23-24).⁶⁶

If intergenerational concerns lie at the heart of certain biblical laws and narratives, perhaps also the original composition of the biblical failure-to-come-of-age narratives can be attributed to a similar motivation. For example, the Samson narratives could be understood as stories told amongst elders about the difficulties associated with rearing a boy properly—the need to channel his sexual urges into appropriate (endogamous) expressions, the dangers associated with adolescent willfulness and impetuosity, etc.⁶⁷ In complementary fashion, the Samson and Jether stories could also have originally functioned as cautionary tales told by adults to boys on the verge of manhood. In this case too intergenerational tensions would serve as the primary motivation for the stories' compositions; only here the audience is different. In this view, the Jether story could have been told to young men to stress the importance of valor and of obedience to both one's father and one's battlefield commander. Similarly, the

⁶⁵ Meyers, "Family in Early Israel," 35.

⁶⁶ Jon Berquist, *Controlling Corporeality: The Body and the Household in Ancient Israel* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 127.

⁶⁷ Michael J. Smith's claim that Samson's characterization fits the description of the rebellious son in Deut 21:18-21 ("Failure of the Family in Judges, Part 2: Samson," *BSac* 162 [2005], 430) lends support to this proposal.

Samson cycle's purpose would be to ensure a child's proper obedience to parental advice by warning the child of the dangers associated with disobedience.⁶⁸ The message of the stories to young men, then, is that to behave like Samson or Jether is to never become recognized as an Israelite man.

In contrast to the opinion shared by Bynum and Beissinger that these tales function as responses by the elder male generation to issues of intergenerational succession, another possible explanation suggests that stories of failing to come of age address common psychological concerns among the young. According to this theory, the difficulties and ambiguities associated with male coming of age—a process made more uncertain for boys than for girls because distinct physiological evidence of this transition is lacking for the former, while menstruation provides this evidence for the latter—provide the psychological subtext for tales about the failure to mature. For boys who are still navigating this time of transition, or young men not too far removed from this stage of their life, a story about a man-child like Samson or a failed attempt at maturation like Jether would have a natural appeal. These characters' struggles reflect young

⁶⁸ In this view, the Samson cycle would bear similarities with texts from the wisdom tradition such as Prov 7. Indeed, the similarity between the Samson cycle and wisdom literature is demonstrated by Brettler, who argues that the polemic against marriage to foreign women and the use of riddles in the Samson cycle are evidence of wisdom's influence on the composition. See Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Book of Judges* (Old Testament Readings; London/New York: Routledge, 2002), 51-52.

men's/boys' struggles, and in their ultimate failure to reach their goal of maturation other boys can find the embodiment of their own worst fears about the status of their newly-minted manhood, or a negative foil against which to measure their own accomplishments.

Supporting this hypothesis is Niditch's claim that both the stories of Jether and of Samson originally found their oral-performative context (prior to their being written down) in what she calls the "epic bardic tradition."⁶⁹ This tradition of oral narratives concerns itself with tales of mighty warriors and heroes, chivalry, codes of military conduct, the division of spoil, etc.⁷⁰ While Niditch speculates that tales from this strain of oral narrative were eventually written down in the context of a royal court,⁷¹ the obvious interest of these stories with martial matters suggests an original military context for the narratives in this tradition. In other words, narratives in the epic bardic tradition like those of Jether and Samson started out as "army stories," told by the young men who comprise Israel's army to other young men (or even boys serving as squires or retainers),

⁶⁹ Niditch, *Judges*, 9-10. The Jether pericope indicates its place in this tradition for its use of bardic conventions like proverbs, and its concern with codes of military conduct (ibid., 105). The use of epic language and style in the Samson story (ibid., 15, 142), as well as the similarity of Samson to other epic heroes like Hercules (ibid., 9), provides evidence for the "epic bardic" origins of the Samson cycle.

⁷⁰ See Susan Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 113; see also Niditch, *War*, 90-105.

⁷¹ Niditch, *War*, 105; see also Niditch, *Oral World*, 113.

in order to pass the time. If the identification of these stories as originally coming from an epic bardic tradition is correct, the *Sitz im Leben* better fits the psychological explanation just offered than the previous explanation offered by Bynum and Beissinger. These tales, then, would respond not to the social and psychological anxieties of the elder generation, but to the psychological anxieties of youths negotiating their own maturation.

To summarize, two theories inspired by folklore studies may help to explain the origins of “failure to come of age” stories like those of Jether and Samson. One theory suggests that these tales—that can be found in cultures as temporally removed from each other as ancient Greece and the modern Balkans—may have been composed originally to address the perpetual social problem of generational succession. Another theory finds the genesis of such folkloric tales in the mental and emotional concerns of older boys and young men in the process of maturing into full adult manhood in their society.

5.4 The Literary Function of Samson’s Failure to Come of Age

Having discussed the possible social context and purpose of the failure-to-come-of-age theme, I will now treat the less speculative subject of the theme’s narrative

function in the context of Judges and the larger Deuteronomistic History. In this final section, I will treat only the Samson cycle, since its literary function in Judges is much more noteworthy than the brief Jether narrative.

The choice by DtrH to put a story such as the Samson cycle with its deeply flawed hero into the historical narrative demands explanation, as does the prominent position the Samson story takes at the conclusion of the cycle of named judges. An analysis of the Samson cycle in light of the character's failure to come of age reveals solutions to these questions by highlighting how Samson's immaturity reflects broader themes in the Dtr historian's assessment of Israel during the period of the judges.

An important insight for this discussion is that the character of Samson in many ways embodies Israel at this point in the historical narrative. A number of scholars make this observation, but few devote more detailed attention to this comparison than Dennis Olson and, separately, Edward Greenstein.⁷² For Olson, Samson's submission to the Philistines and his tragic captivity in Gaza is used by DtrH to mirror the plight of Israel

⁷² Others who argue that Samson stands in as a metaphorical representation of all Israel include: Crenshaw (*Secret Betrayed*, 134); Brevard S. Childs (*Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* [Philadelphia, Fortress, 1985] 114-15); and Everett Fox ("Samson Cycle," 53). More generally, Jeremy Schipper shows that in the Deuteronomistic History the historical predicament of Israel is often inscribed on the bodies of the history's characters, since characters with disabilities appear at moments of political transition in the historical narrative, reflecting the deterioration of the old political order ("Disabling Israelite Leadership: 2 Samuel 6:23 and Other Images of Disability in the Deuteronomistic History," in *This Able Body: Rethinking Disabilities in Biblical Studies* [ed. Hector Avalos, Sarah J. Melcher, and Jeremy Schipper; SemeiaSt 55; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007], 103-13).

during the Babylonian exile.⁷³ Greenstein sees Samson's story as an "allegorical digest" of the preceding narrative in Judges, where Samson stands in for the Israelites in his time and his nazirite vows represent the covenant between Israel and Yhwh.⁷⁴

Olson, Greenstein, and others are right to highlight how Samson epitomizes the plight of Israel at this point in the Dtr historical narrative. However, by not recognizing the significance for Samson's characterization of his failure to come of age, they limit the explanatory potential of their insights. It is precisely in his inability to cross the border into maturity once and for all that Samson most resembles Israel in the period of the judges. This first becomes evident when considering the cyclical pattern of Israelite history running through Judges, wherein Israel does evil in the eyes of Yhwh, is punished by being given into the hands of an enemy, and cries out to Yhwh who sends a deliverer to free the people and bring a period of peace.⁷⁵ The repetition of this pattern—recurring in six completed cycles in the textual block of Judg 3:7-16:31—illustrates Israel's inability to escape the destructive cycle of behaviors that keeps the nation stuck in a state of weakness and vulnerability to external powers. Samson's similar failure to transition out of his liminal status caught between boyhood and manhood

⁷³ Dennis T. Olson, "Judges," 860-62.

⁷⁴ Edward L. Greenstein, "The Riddle of Samson," *Proof 1* (1981): 247-55.

⁷⁵ For the first and most succinct of the six instances of this cycle, see Judg 3:7-11.

metaphorically corresponds to Israel's repetition of this pattern that prevents the nation from maturing politically.

Moreover, the reasons that both Samson and Israel remain caught in their respective vicious cycles share similarities. For example, just as Samson's boyish impetuosity causes him to ignore his parents' advice that would guide him towards proper Israelite manhood (14:2), so too Israel repeatedly turns its back on the lessons of history and the instruction of the nation's symbolic parent, Yhwh. As a result of not heeding his parents' advice and instead choosing to court foreign women, Samson's fails to accomplish the manly deed of producing legitimate heirs with an Israelite woman and thereby endangers the perpetuation of his paternal lineage. Israel, likewise, endangers their future on the land that is their inheritance due to a penchant for marriage with foreigners causing them to stray from Yhwh, their sustainer upon the land (Judg 3:6).

Samson's similarities with Israel are further illustrated by the fact that unlike each of the judges preceding him, his fatal flaw inhibiting his potential as a leader is ostensibly something within his control: his immaturity. In contrast, Ehud's left-handedness, Deborah's femininity, Gideon's humble origins, and Jephthah's illegitimate birth—all of which are considered flaws that an ideal military and religious leader in the

world of the text would not possess—fall outside of the individual judge's control.⁷⁶ In this sense too Samson resembles Israel. Both are given every advantage from the moment of their birth and both possess a special relationship with God (Samson through his oft-neglected nazirite vows and Israel through its covenant). Yet in spite of this, each consistently fails to live up to their potential and willfully strays from the proper path of development—masculine maturity in Samson's case, religious and consequently political rectitude in Israel's.

Still another way in which Samson's status as a liminal man-child typifies Israel at the time of the judges is his inability or unwillingness to form bonds with the adult men of Israel. This functions as a significant feature in Samson's characterization as someone less than a man in his society, as seen above. Again here a feature of Samson's liminality parallels the plight of the Israelites in Judges. Throughout the book, the portrayal of Israel's own political immaturity is similarly defined by a failure to achieve internal cohesion among its constituent tribes, a situation that tragically culminates in the Israelite civil war described in Judg 19-21. Just as Samson's lack of solidarity with his fellow Israelites prevents his maturation, so also does Israel's own internal lack of solidarity prevent its political development.

⁷⁶ The observation that each of the judges possesses a crucial flaw that makes them unlikely heroes is that of Carol Meyers (personal communication, December 2011).

Given these similarities between Samson's story and that of Israel, it is no wonder that DtrH chose to place the Samson story at the tragic endpoint of the process of "progressive deterioration" that the historian traces throughout the cycle of major judges in Judg 3:17-16:31.⁷⁷ It is likely that the Dtr historian wished to draw attention to the comparison between the man-child Samson and Israel, since Samson's immaturity so perfectly embodies the historian's understanding of Israel's predicament at that time in the narrative. He did so, therefore, primarily through his editorial choice to place the Samson cycle in a position of prominence within the larger narrative.

In summary, an important feature of Samson's epitomization of Israel in the time of the judges is his inability to transition to manhood. Just as Samson seems stuck in a liminal phase between boyhood and manhood, so too Israel cannot help but repeat a self-destructive cycle that keeps them vulnerable and weak. Samson's disobedience of his parents, his attraction to foreign women, and his failure to bond with Israelite men — each of which marks him as less than a man in Israelite society — parallels Israel's disobedience of Yhwh, intermarriage with Canaanites, and internal divisiveness. Moreover, both Samson and Israel have only themselves to blame for their failures, since they have squandered the immense potential resulting from their special relationships

⁷⁷ For a discussion of this deterioration, see, e.g., Tanner, "Gideon Narrative," 152.

with Yhwh. To emphasize the notable similarities between Samson's failure to come of age and Israel's political immaturity, DtrH made the editorial decision to situate the Samson story prominently at the conclusion of the cycle of named judges.

Samson would die while still suspended in his liminal phase between boyhood and manhood. The troubled adolescence of Israel, however, did not last forever. Israel would experience its own transition into mature and well-formed nationhood in the Deuteronomistic History with the coming of the Davidic monarchy—whose eponymous founder, significantly, is associated with a narrative (1 Sam 17) full of coming-of-age tropes (see chapter 3). Israel embodied in David (the boy who slays a giant and becomes a man) stands in bold contrast to the earlier Israel embodied in Samson (the man-child who is unable to mature).

In this chapter, therefore, I have completed the study of the male coming-of-age theme in the HB by demonstrating that this topic also encompasses stories of a boy's failure to come of age. The story of Jether in Judg 8 depicts a boy who is unable to do the grisly work of killing enemies in battle and avenging familial honor required of a man. The Samson cycle provides an example of arrested male development, with its liminal hero perpetually caught at the border between boyhood and manhood. I also showed

that like coming-of-age tales, stories describing the failure to come of age are attested over time in many cultures and serve important social and/or psychological purposes. Finally, I demonstrated how the Deuteronomistic editor and redactor of the Samson cycle used Samson's failure to come of age to emphasize Israel's political immaturity at that point in its history.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This project has identified male coming-of-age as a recurring theme in the HB and has discussed how the redactors of the HB employ coming-of-age stories to emphasize broader themes and to highlight significant narrative transitions. It has also considered how these stories provide insight into representations of masculinity in the HB. This concluding chapter reviews the project's major arguments and contributions, and suggests potential avenues for the further development of this research.

6.1 Chapter Review

This study begins by noting the almost complete absence of scholarship on the theme of male coming-of-age in the HB. This lacuna is especially noteworthy because in recent decades scholars have shown increasing interest in the subject of masculinity in the HB and the exegetical application of the rite-of-passage schema to biblical texts, both topics that are closely related to coming-of-age. My detailed discussion of these two topics indicates how biblical research in these areas is incomplete without a discussion of male coming-of-age. I also show how certain key principles from research into masculinity and rites of passage frame my project.

The introductory chapter then reviews previous attempts—specifically, the works of White, Propp, and Bechtel—to identify the coming-of-age theme in the HB. Their strengths and weaknesses are highlighted, and their approaches are contrasted with that of the present study. The four principles guiding my exegesis are then explained. These principles, which were designed to add specificity to this study’s attempt to locate the coming-of-age theme and to avoid some of the mistakes evident in previous research, are: (1) terminology is a key indicator of a character’s status as a boy or as a man; (2) a coming-of-age narrative will feature a boy acquiring and/or displaying qualities associated with manhood; (3) the presence of a rite-of-passage schema can help to identify a narrative as a coming-of-age story, although it is not necessary; and (4) the changes that signify a boy’s coming-of-age must happen within the defined borders of an individual narrative for it to be considered a coming-of-age story. The introductory chapter concludes with a statement of the project’s goals and an outline of its structure.

Chapter 2 compares the characteristics of biblical manhood with those of boyhood, an essential task in identifying when a character ceases to be described in the HB as a boy and begins to be considered a man. Among the major features of biblical manhood are strength, intelligence, and avoidance of association with women—all of which are recognized by Clines in his seminal article “David the Man” (1995). In the

years since this article appeared, scholars have added the features of self-control, fertility and marriage, honor, and kinship solidarity to the portrait of biblical masculinity. It is also important to recognize that even if a man does not embody the ideals of hegemonic masculinity, he is reckoned as a man by certain legal texts in the HB if he is twenty years old.

The analysis of boyhood in the HB revealed that the terms used to describe boys can be separated into two groups: one describing younger boys from birth to approximately twelve years old and the other describing older boys/young men from approximately age thirteen to twenty. The former group (to which belong the terms ילד, עול, יונק, גמול, טף, and in many cases נער) are defined by their vulnerability, lack of social and physical power, unwise impetuosity, and beauty (particularly their youthful complexions). Additionally, these boys are frequently associated with women. In contrast, the older group of boys (described with the terms בָּחוּר and עָלָם) resemble men in almost every way since they are strong and virile and can engage in military exploits. The only apparent difference between these older boys and adult men is that the former are always depicted as unmarried and childless.

This detailed description of the characteristics of boyhood and manhood provided the foundation for the identification and analysis of biblical coming-of-age

narratives. The discussion of these coming-of-age narratives was divided into two chapters based on the types of characters at their center: royal characters in chapter 3, and prophetic characters in chapter 4. In chapter 3, 1 Sam 17 is read as the maturation tale of David, who begins the story described as a boy, but who transitions out of this boyishness through his display of strength and his defense of Israel's honor by defeating Goliath—a transition emphasized by the reference to David as an עָלִם at the story's end. Moreover, David ensures his final transition to manhood by securing a marriage for himself. The presence of the tripartite rite-of-passage schema (separation-marginality-reintegration) in this story further helps to identify 1 Sam 17 as David's coming-of-age.

Solomon's coming-of-age is narrated in two versions: one in 1 Kgs 1-2 (the conclusion of the Succession Narrative) and the other in 1 Kgs 3 (the scene at Gibeon in which Solomon asks for and receives wisdom from Yhwh). The former shares many features of David's maturation tale in 1 Sam 17. Both stress the expression of strength through bellicose force as an important marker of masculinity—along with marriage, wisdom, the defense of honor, and kinship solidarity. In contrast, 1 Kgs 3 depicts Solomon's coming-of-age without violence. Moreover, in this version Solomon is not compelled to assert his masculine qualities to demonstrate maturation because the

qualities of manhood (which in this narrative include wisdom as judicial acumen, riches, and honor) are given to him at once by Yhwh.

Comparing the three maturation tales in this chapter reveals both their depictions of masculinity and the redactor's use of the coming-of-age theme to indicate significant shifts in the historical narrative. The continuity in the manner of coming-of-age between David in 1 Sam 17 and Solomon in 1 Kgs 1-2 highlights the retrospective quality of the latter, a fitting tactic if this story is the conclusion of a larger narrative block running through 2 Samuel (as Rost claims). The dream narrative in 1 Kgs 3, with its alternative view of Solomon's coming-of-age, does not look back to David and the past as does 1 Kgs 1-2; it instead points forward to Solomon's future as a wise and peaceful empire builder.

The conclusion of chapter 3 suggests that the masculinity presented in 1 Kgs 3, which differs in many ways with that of 1 Sam 17, 1 Kgs 1-2, and indeed the majority of the HB (as described in chapter 2), may represent a new masculinity for a new age. Perhaps, if DtrH was as heavily involved in the composition or editing of this story as some scholars argue, then the lack of violence and decreased concern for forcefully-defended manly honor evident in 1 Kgs 3 may reflect an appeal on the part of DtrH for a new hegemonic masculinity that downplays the importance of violence and honor.

Chapter 4 examines the coming-of-age stories of Moses and Samuel, two prophetic figures. Moses' maturation is presented in Exod 2, which employs narrative structure and *Leitworte* to draw attention to the coming-of-age theme. This theme is also emphasized by Moses' manly actions in the second scene of Exod 2 (vv. 11-22). In this narrative, he displays the qualities of strength, wisdom, courage, and kinship solidarity. He also marries and begets a son. These displays of masculinity function to answer the challenge to his status as an adult man voiced by the "guilty Hebrew" in Exod 2:14. Samuel's maturation, like Moses', is also highlighted by the structure of his childhood narrative in 1 Sam 1-3 and by the repetition of certain *Leitworte* (e.g., the frequent use of נָעַר to describe Samuel prior to his first prophetic act and the threefold repetition of גָּדַל signaling the completion of his growth). Samuel's transition from social timidity and powerlessness to a position of authority is the most significant change to the character signifying his maturation. The other major change to Samuel in 1 Sam 3—his ability to discern Yhwh's word—owes more to the genre of 1 Sam 3 as a call narrative than it does to the coming-of-age theme.

Chapter 4 concludes with comparisons, first of the Moses and Samuel coming-of-age narratives. This comparison revealed many more differences than similarities. The agonistic nature of Moses' coming-of-age, in which he announces and confirms his new

manhood through his deeds in response to the challenge of other men, sharply contrasts with the idyllic story of 1 Sam 3, in which Samuel's transition to manhood lacks any bold demonstration of valor or force and is helped along by Yhwh and Eli. Next, a comparison of these two prophetic coming-of-age narratives with the royal maturation tales showed that Moses' story resembles those of David in 1 Sam 17 and Solomon in 1 Kgs 1-2, while Samuel's contains many similarities to Solomon's coming-of-age in 1 Kgs 3. The correspondence between these latter two stories, both of which have been identified by scholars as compositions of DtrH (or at least as narratives heavily edited by DtrH), further supports the claim in chapter 3 that perhaps DtrH is advocating for a less bellicose masculinity.

Chapter 5 demonstrates that the coming-of-age theme is not limited to stories of successful maturation to manhood but also includes narratives that can be read as inversions of the theme—that is, as tales of failing to come of age. One example is the brief Jether narrative in Judg 8, and another is the longer Samson cycle in Judg 13-16. The former tells of Jether's failure to do the manly deeds of using violence against other men on the battlefield and defending family honor and solidarity. Similarly, Samson is depicted as a man-child: a figure who combines features of manhood and boyhood and who appears to be a perpetually liminal character caught at the border between these

two statuses. The function and social context of stories describing a boy's failure to mature is also considered. Comparative data from folklore studies reveals that such tales may function to address the recurrent social problem of intergenerational succession. Alternatively, these stories may arise from the psychological need for boys and young men to describe their fears about maturation or to create a negative foil against which to compare their own masculine development. The chapter's conclusion shows how DtrH uses the theme of Samson's arrested development to highlight Israel's lack of political maturity during the period of the judges.

6.2 Contributions

The best way to discuss the contributions of this project to biblical studies is first to note the extent to which it accomplished the three goals set forth in the introductory chapter. The study's primary goal was to identify coming-of-age as a recurring theme in the HB. By locating five narratives that depict a boy's successful transition to manhood and two examples of the failure to do so, the project has achieved this goal. Moreover, it has offered a template, in the form of four exegetical principles for recognizing the maturation theme, for identifying the theme in other ancient texts. This project will, I

hope, lead to greater interest in biblical conceptions of boyhood, manhood, and the transition between the two.

The project also had two secondary objectives. The first was to consider how the coming-of-age theme is employed by biblical narrators and redactors to highlight important messages, themes, and transitions in the historical narratives of the HB. The Samson cycle provided the most obvious example of how the coming-of-age theme (more specifically, its inverse in the failure-to-come-of-age theme) was used in this way. Samson's status as a liminal man-child typifies the political predicament of Israel in the time of the judges in several ways, thereby justifying its placement by DtrH at a prominent position at the end of the cycle of major judges. Moreover, both the Jether and Samson stories function as counterpoints to the successful coming-of-age of David in 1 Sam 17. The relationship between these two tales of failing to come of age and David's successful maturation signifies the transition of Israel from immaturity to nationhood and political power.

The analysis revealed other examples in which the narrator calls attention to broader themes and transitions through coming-of-age stories. For example, Samuel's successful maturation functions as an important aspect of the extended comparison between him and Eli's sons, a comparison that heralds the establishment of a new

system of leadership under Samuel and the death of the old order under the Elides. Finally, the two stories of Solomon's coming-of-age in 1 Kgs 1-2 and 1 Kgs 3 mark a significant transition in the history of Israel. The retrospective nature of 1 Kgs 2, in which Solomon matures like his father David with displays of strength and cunning, signals its close connection with the David narratives and their militaristic ethos. The Gibeon story in 1 Kgs 3 instead looks forward to Solomon's peaceful reign, since here Solomon's maturation is not achieved through the exertion of his power and political machinations against other men but rather is accomplished by Yhwh bestowing certain manly qualities (judicial wisdom, riches, and honor) on the young man.

The other secondary objective of this project was to use coming-of-age stories as a window into biblical masculinity, a hermeneutical choice justified by the connection between the two subjects indicated in chapter 1. More specifically, the goal was to determine whether biblical coming-of-age stories reflect the same views of hegemonic masculinity found in other texts in the HB. In the case of the maturation tales of Moses in Exod 2, David in 1 Sam 17, and Solomon in 1 Kgs 1-2, many of the recognized features of hegemonic biblical masculinity are evident. These stories stress strength, wisdom, honor, solidarity, fertility, and marriage as keys to masculinity—as does the HB in general. Even the stories describing the failure to come of age seem to reflect this

understanding of masculinity, as Jether's failure to mature is marked by his inability to show bellicose strength and to defend his family's honor, both values generally associated with masculinity throughout the HB. Similarly, Samson's liminal status as a man-child is indicated by his possession of some of these masculine characteristics (most notably strength, but also rhetorical skill—a function of wisdom) but lack of others (self-control, kinship solidarity, marriage, and children).

In contrast, the image of masculinity offered in the maturation tales of Solomon in 1 Kgs 3 and Samuel in 1 Sam 3 differs from the standard hegemonic masculinity in the HB. Most significantly, the display of physical and often violent force is absent in these stories. Furthermore, while values like honor, social authority, and wisdom are present, they are not displayed by the boy protagonists as signs of maturation but rather are given to them by Yhwh. Thus, these narratives do not depict a boy's agonistic effort to prove his manhood, as do the other coming-of-age stories. I suggested at the conclusion of chapters 3 and 4 that the alternative articulation of masculinity presented in these narratives may represent an attempt by DtrH (who likely composed or heavily edited 1 Sam 3 and 1 Kgs 3) to offer a new hegemonic masculinity that differs from the masculinity found in other texts. Detailed speculation on the reason DtrH may have

proposed this new alternative was not offered in this study; however, this question could motivate research in the future (see below).

This study also contributes to biblical scholarship by providing a model for incorporating research from anthropology and from folklore studies. Anthropological research on rites-of-passage provided important foundational assumptions to the project. The connection between the tripartite structure of separation-marginality-reintegration and *rituals* of maturation was applied to *narratives* on this theme, an exegetical approach inspired by anthropologist Victor Turner's identification of ritual structures in literature. Anthropological research showing how male maturation rites illuminate the values central to masculinity in a culture provided the justification for my use of male coming-of-age narratives in the HB to describe biblical hegemonic masculinity. However, anthropological research was used cautiously and according to principles that prevented the over-application of especially the rite-of-passage schema. Folklore studies were incorporated into the study of the Samson and Jether tales in chapter 5. This research showed that stories of failing to come of age like these two are common, and may serve important social purposes.

In sum, the most significant contribution of this project is the identification of a theme in HB narratives that has previously been virtually unnoticed: the maturation of a

boy into a man. By accomplishing this primary goal, the project begins a conversation on a subject that has received little attention. Next, by demonstrating how the biblical redactors and narrators employ coming-of-age stories to highlight broader themes and significant transitions in the narrative, this project contributes to the recognition of the careful artistry of the final form of the biblical text. Moreover, the argument that male coming-of-age stories mostly reflect the views of hegemonic masculinity found in the rest of the HB—but on occasion they differ markedly—contributes to the growing discussion of biblical masculinity and its development over time. Finally, the project provides a model for applying research from fields external to biblical studies, namely anthropology and folklore studies.

6.3 Directions for future research

This dissertation has the potential to generate a number of related research projects in the future. One such project would entail expanding the purview of the current investigation to include deuterocanonical Jewish texts from the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Doing so would require an extensive study of masculinity and childhood in the classical world along the lines of chapter 2 of this study. Initial inspection suggests that narratives of male maturation can be found in both Tobias'

journey to Media and his marriage in the book of Tobit and the stories of the martyred brothers in 2 and 4 Maccabees. An intriguing question motivating this research is whether these Jewish works from the Hellenistic age reflect the conceptions of manhood, childhood, and the transition between the two in the classical world, or if instead they are more reliant on the biblical coming-of-age narratives identified in this project.

Next, while this study identified seven coming-of-age narratives in the HB, it could be asked why this theme is not more frequently attested in biblical literature. Furthermore, of the seven narratives analyzed, six are found in the Deuteronomistic History, while other large narrative sections of the canon (most notably the ancestor tales of Genesis and the Chronicler's history) contain no examples of this theme.¹ Closer investigation of the absence of coming-of-age stories in these portions of the canon may foster a discussion on varying conceptions of maturation in different sections of the HB.

Another avenue for future research is to examine the extent to which the story of Israel's birth, growth, and eventual death in the Deuteronomistic History resembles the

¹ Indeed, it appears that the Chronicler may have intentionally excised the theme. For example, the story of David and Goliath in 1 Sam 17—which functions as David's coming-of-age—has no equivalent in 1 Chronicles. Similarly, David's final advice to Solomon in 1 Chr 28, like its counterpart in 1 Kgs 2, contains David's exhortation that his son be strong (both using the verb חזק; 1 Kgs 2:2; 1 Chr 28:10), but it removes the demand in 1 Kgs 2 that Solomon mature and "become a man" (הָיִיתָ לְאִישׁ). The Gibeon story in 2 Chr 1 also removes the most obvious indicator of the coming-of-age theme present in its counterpart in 1 Kgs 3: Solomon's admission that he is only a "little boy" (נֶעָר קָטָן; v. 7).

male life cycle in ancient Israel. In this view, the opening act of the Deuteronomistic History (Israel's crossing of the Jordan into Canaan) may function symbolically as Israel's birth. Immediately afterward the infant Israel is circumcised, in the episode in which Joshua circumcises the wilderness generation at Gibeath-haaraloth (Josh 5). A promising youth follows, in which the young Israel maintains a close relationship with its parent Yhwh, who provides for its needs and fights its battles, as reported in Joshua. However, as demonstrated in this study, this promising youth is followed by a time of rebellion and the failure to mature, as typified especially by Samson. Israel's maturity into adulthood is narrated in 1-2 Samuel and 1 Kgs 1-11, a section of the historical narrative that this project has shown to contain a concentration of successful coming-of-age narratives (Samuel in 1 Sam 3, David in 1 Sam 17, and Solomon in both 1 Kgs 1-2 and 1 Kgs 3). If the remainder of 1-2 Kings can be shown to contain imagery associated with old age and to depict the slow degeneration and death of central characters, then it could be suggested that DtrH intended to personify Israel's history according to the male life cycle.

Finally, it may be worthwhile to investigate further whether DtrH consistently advocates for the same form of masculinity that appears in the coming-of-age narratives that "he" has likely composed or heavily edited (i.e., 1 Sam 3 and 1 Kgs 3). In other

words, do other sections of Joshua-2 Kings that are clearly the work of DtrH (such as Solomon's dedication of the Jerusalem temple in 1 Kgs 8 or the Josiah narratives in 2 Kgs 22-23) also depict a masculinity less concerned with displays of violent force and the need to publically and repeatedly prove one's manhood and defend one's honor? If so, can DtrH's social and historical context explain this move? It is possible, for example, that the position of elite Judean/Jewish men in an exilic or post-exilic context in which government and the monopoly of force were no longer in their control would create conditions in which a notion of masculinity that stresses qualities other than strength through violence and the forceful defense of honor could arise. The conclusions of this research could offer an important contribution to the study of masculinity in the HB and into the ideology and historical context of DtrH.

This study has shown that the male coming-of-age theme so prevalent in world literature throughout history is also present in the collected literature of ancient Israel. The names of David, Solomon, Moses, and Samuel, therefore, can be added to the list of famed initiatory heroes that includes Gilgamesh, Candide, and Holden Caulfield. Whenever and wherever there are boys who grow to become men—or men who

remember their own transition to maturity—it seems that there too will be stories about the experience.

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Biography

Stephen Wilson (born March 26, 1978 in Lewes, Delaware) is a sixth-year doctoral student in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament track of the Graduate Department of Religion at Duke University. He attended Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., where he studied international history at Georgetown's School of Foreign Service and received his B.S. in 2000. He then received a full scholarship to study Hebrew language and Judaism at the Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies at Oxford University, graduating with a M.St. in 2001. He began his more specialized study of Hebrew Bible while at Iliff School of Theology from 2002-2005, where he was awarded a Presidential Scholarship and received an M.Div. degree.

During his time in the doctoral program at Duke, Stephen has been the recipient of a Kearns Summer Fellowship and was introduced to archaeological field work at Sepphoris under the supervision of Profs. Eric and Carol Meyers. Stephen's research interests in recent years have included the history and historiography of ancient Israel and Greece, gender studies, social scientific approaches to the Hebrew Bible, and Hebrew poetry. Many of these interests are incorporated in his dissertation on the male coming-of-age theme in the Hebrew Bible, and in his forthcoming article in the *Journal of*

Biblical Literature: "Samson the Man-Child: Failing to Come of Age in the Deuteronomistic History."

After completing his research on coming-of-age in the Hebrew Bible, Stephen would like to combine his work on biblical masculinity with his interest in Hebrew poetry by returning to a subject of perennial interest for him: the book of Ecclesiastes. He also looks forward to the opportunity to teach the next generation to be engaged, intelligent readers of the Hebrew Bible.